Leslie A. Fiedler

# THE FEAR OF INNOCENCE

I came without music to the street, the house, the door; unsure, I waited while the bell made its catarrhal squawk in the imagined inner cube of dark and quiet. There was no footstep, no tremor, no pulse of answer; and I noticed then the newspapers and milk-bottles at my feet. Three days, I figured, or four, but before the thought could form "Carrie's gone away"—I smelled her.

I had come through the city I hated to that remembered square, pretending to falter at each turning as though I had forgotten the way. There was no reason, after all, that I *should* have remembered so long, so precisely, the circumstance, the setting of what had been no more than a minor embarrassment.

It offended me, but not deeply enough for forgetting, that Carrie's apartment should in the logic of the case be just there: among the kitschy jewelers and within sight of that other, the larger Square where as a boy I had indulged my anguish among bootblacks and a few uncertain trees. One could watch from Carrie's windows, I knew, the façade of the School where I had fumbled inexpertly with patience and rage; but no one watched. I had seen from the street before entering the blinds pulled tight against the sun in the windows I guessed were hers, and I knew I had only imagined their trembling.

I would not accept the city, walking it in the blue and gold uniform I no longer had to wear, mark of my choice now and not the regalia of the last choice but one; for accepting it, I would have had to surrender my sense that at the moment of Discharge, between two areas of allegiance, I was as I had never been, free. It was hard for me to believe that soon, soon I would submit again to the ruinous empire of work, habit and discontent; harder to believe that at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thirteen or fourteen I had learned down these very streets obedience without love, the meaning of the state, my drawers bunched under my sweating buttocks, and in each of my hands, wet and creased under the rope's fretting, a roped bundle—thirty-six lashed-together boxes, in each, right shoe and left face to face, conjugally in the secret tissue.

And some who had brushed me, or opened soft and heedless as water for my passage, were dead.

I did not stop by the store windows that had made for me once small ecstasies: the pawnshop's grill of iron and behind, between saxophones, the yellow, incredible diamond; or the fronts of picture-shops where no one seemed ever to enter (the boy at the glass could fancy them mere scenic flats for his eye's beguiling, with beyond perhaps only the grey field between blind walls and the goat cropping iron), and always in their clutter the same goose nibbling a child's pecker over the joke in French, or the miraculously opening eyes of a Christ in chromotone, an easy benediction, if the light lay right, for the squinter. Stopping, I might have seen on the depthless glass my furtive image, not the boy's face I continued to imagine behind the mere somatic changes of my other—that no pilgrimage, no piety could evoke.

I should not, I suppose, have come back at all to the door, the unforeseen milk-bottles and the smell, except for meeting Dan, and Dan I should not have met had I not—but that way is a regression to the six days of creation or beyond. I had met Dan where all my parallel impulses of violence and pity, evasion and longing had improbably intersected, at sea and moving toward invasion.

We had been playing medicine-ball at the butt-end of the afternoon, contemptuous of the water's slope and shudder, on the open deck-space below the bridge, when I first noticed Dan. It is a game, you know, of immense intimacy and aggression; and one soon senses who has too much at stake, standing close enough to smell each other's sweat, to see the drops hang quivering on the furrow between nose and lip; marking what grunt betrays the over-involved prestige, what crisis of breath is cued by fear and not fatigue.

The gross *whack* of the unyielding ball, slippery with one's own slipperiness, the faces hung with their rigid smiles of comradeliness

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

between the hunched, inimical shoulders, the ritual of deception and assault, Dan could not abide; and his unwillingness to hide his terror and contempt, to let his beefy shoulders and his stubborn jaw deceive us seemed a provocation.

He declared himself the natural enemy of our heartiness, and once on to his ill-kept secret, what could we do but smack the ball into him, harder, harder; to whatever hands he threw, from whatever quarter, the moist flushed head would move toward him with an unpitying jerk, a snap of outward breath, and the sodden leather bulk would be back before his own breath into his gut. Away—back; away—back! I could see a nerve beat to the compulsive rhythm in the hollow back of his right knee, his wrists tremble meaninglessly, and his eye, shifting with the motion of the ball, his shameless fear. Back—back!

I had chosen, in a surrender to sweat and childhood, to join the brutal conspiracy below thought, below the will, at the sweet muscular level of aggression; to punish the insolence of weakness, the possibility I had not chosen, seemed enough. But, amphibian at heart, I had moved before I knew it at his nerve's quivering, back to empathy, my other element. I let the ball fall from my fingers with no attempt at conviction, and as I fumbled after it toward the rail, I could hear Dan escaping. "Guess I'll get a shower and sack out." And after him, the shouts of the others that confessed nothing, "Good game! Some workout!" would let him believe only in the random insights of dreams that he had there known terror.

He knew though what I had done and claimed me as a secret comrade and ally with a quiet certainty I could not dismay. He would wait for me, silently reading in my bunk or leaning against a bulkhead, as Baldy and John and I played cribbage, ignoring our conventional obscenities, and refusing the drinks we occasionally offered him with some embarrassment; or when I went into the wardroom for a cup of coffee toward dawn after a night of poker, I would find him dozing over a pile of letters stacked up before him with nervous precision, the edges of stamp and envelope parallel. "Well," he would say, "well—" and we would be off again.

Over the green tops of the tables through the endless furry noise of the ventilators, and at the rail, our eyes on the waterline where the classic, melancholy swell ("*Sehnsucht,*" Dan would say, his sole word

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of German, to the sea's sussuration, *"Sehnsucht!"*) that had moved unbroken from beyond the rim of our seeing, was lost at last in a frivolous welter against our side, we talked and talked.

He was a writer, of course; that is to say, a certain breathless faith in self-revelation, a flair for exploiting his own meretricious boyishness had survived in him a year of writing scripts in Hollywood. "I had to get out of there. They were killing the Real Me!" For the sake of this pseudo-innocence, he deferred adulthood (though, quite inconsistently, he would make the motions of cynicism he had confused with it), remained fixed in the callow gesture of amazement and emulation to which all his stories recurred.

"By God, Pa," he had said after his first year at Harvard (and one was left to imagine the shy or hopeful seediness of the father he would never describe, but whose continual embarrassed approval he could not spare), "the greatest brains of the world are in this hall!" He could never, I knew, though he laughed telling it, do more than apply compulsively for admission into that boy's fancied fraternity of wit and achievement.

Hal (I had not remembered to avoid that memory) had been just so at first, struggling with the naive terror of his naiveté, I realized watching Dan, though Hal had had no father, had avoided with painful deviousness the very word. Oh, certainly he would lie if one pressed the subject, with a lazy insolence: dead here or perhaps—there, mad, in jail; some off-hand fable, not even the fantasy of evasion, the mere careless rebuff. And I had come to play for him in those early days (there must have been others after), by grace of my year's seniority, what he lacked: the provincial father, dazzled, mocking a little, but essentially approving. Later, even a thousand miles removed and alienated in belief, he had kept after me in letters to be reluctant, to assent; and at last when all other possibilities were lost in bitterness, to exact the father's possessive, abused silence.

Hal had gone to Harvard, too. Harvard: you will find it hard to understand, perhaps, the precise magic of that name for us, high-school kids in an ungenerous world, shaken in those years of economic crisis (when about the table still, thank God, desperately abundant, we read in our parents' eyes the threat of grosser deprivations, the bleaker ennuis of the declassed) not to loosen, but to grasp more frantically our mean security: the clipped scant hedges, the stone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lions on the stoop, the alarm clock ten minutes fast. Harvard: it had mocked and dazzled us, the legendary tweeds and flannels, the soiled saddle-shoes, the undergraduate apparatus of graciousness, and the promise that there might be a casualness not *lumpen,* an ease, perhaps, not sin.

We had talked about it, in the conventional weak banter of the almost-poor, who desire not simply to possess but to despise, while we still sucked our ambivalence with three-cent cups of ices on the stone stoops; and under the long evenings of summer, would break off our discussions of the difference between a horse and a man to beat the kid who farted aloud until he shouted three times, "Watermelon, watermelon, watermelon!"

But we were marked already for the few months at City College and the surrender to weariness, or, at best, the Midwestern school where the restaurant job awaited us and the stereotype: Easterner, Red, Jew, perhaps even the recognition of an expulsion deplored by the *New Republic.*

Later, when our longing had grown too sophisticated to ignore its ambiguities, it was Harvard that served as the other pole to the Young Communist League (we did not dream then those fashionable Popular Front days when revolt, well-groomed, was to be the simple piquancy of convention, and those who cried "Choose!" seemed political schizophrenics): the University or the Revolution, success or rebellion, both dear to us and difficult; if it was not a real option, it was not ignobly imagined.

"The Movement" we called our left allegiance in a shockingly unanalyzed phrase; how parochial in retrospect our ethical imagining; how strait the either-or we proposed and could not escape. *The* Movement, the epithet, all kinesis and no commitment, echoes in the enduring head like a reproach.

The Movement, though, was more than the poor metaphor that persists: the symbolic flirtation at least with denying the whole universe that defined our intolerable exclusion, our outsideness—set against the counter-urge to belong, to infiltrate, become at that world's center the definition of *its* alienation.

It was a pretty irony for boys, but in the end a mask for accommodation. We might have known it from the first, for it was with our real names, those comic-elegant tags the Jews have worn

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

almost to anonymity, Rose-tree or Verdant-hill, that we enrolled in Colleges or filled out forms for jobs; but in the Y.C.L. we wore, we almost were, those jocular, half-scared fictions, the Party Name, the assumed name of a stranger, Robinson or Flint or Smith, oblique confessions at the heart of our revolt, our secret hunger to belong.

But Hal, Hal only of us, got to Harvard, as he fulfilled all our immature velleities in that perilous damned role he came to play, our scape-hero, as it were; as if something, vindictive or full of secret grace, who knew, were bent on making patent to us what tribulations and fatigues we might have achieved, granted literally the best that boyhood could desire. And Hal, at last, like the folk-tale butt with the sausage on the end of his nose, could use the last wish of his splendid luck only to unwish it all, unwish himself to that terrible table, to the solution of cancer. But before we learned what he had been meaning, he danced and dazzled, he taught us envy: went first to Europe, was laid first, first published, first unwilled innocence.

I asked Dan one night on deck, as we leaned to the water that lit our leaning faces with the glow of its cold carapace, if he had known Hal. He had, of course, had paid him court in that room in Eliot House where Hal and Goldberg (you know the name, doubtless, that young composer whose unembarrassedly obvious work is much in favor now) had made in their small circle jokes, nursed the motives of their power, imagined temptations, prepared —

There Dan had received the initial notice of a witty insult, and had come, in course, to sit on the bed's edge or in the angle of wall and wall; to live past the cold periphery of their laughter into its excluding core of warmth. When a new face came afterwards through the door, he could not avoid remembering a little his beginnings, his unbelonging, but he never spoke of it, succeeded in forgiving himself his first ingenuousness, though he was *proud* always of that original insult, for he felt more identified with Hal than with the boy who had not known him. He was, in short, a Disciple, disturbingly for me, Hal's disciple.

"I knew him well," he said, but his memories were actually few, abstract, confused with himself, "terrible the way he died. A waste!"

"You knew him in Hollywood, too?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I seldom saw him there (*pause*), but we did meet a couple of times. He was unhappy there, all the (*pause*) Isherwoods and Swisherwoods! He was the best of us. Did you (*pause*) know Goldberg?" I mark the pauses for you because they were so unforeseen and irregular; he gave to them the weight of words, saved his gestures for them, odd, dislocated gestures. In the end, one had the impression of a sort of transcendental punctuation or even of a code of silences that carried a message he dared not openly confess.

I did not know Goldberg, and had no hope in that shallow gambit of reminiscence anyhow. I should almost have preferred talking politics despite Dan's sentimental Stalinism, which, illiterate and obtuse (as Hal's had been, though I was able to believe his would not have persisted, in this desperate willed paranoia, through the events since his death), saddened me; while my own refusal to make the expected responses of liberalism drove Dan to the degree of embarrassed exasperation, that behind his sort of face, eventuates in blushing and biting of the lip.

"Why are you ashamed when you refuse a drink?" I asked him. I thought I knew, but one had to begin somewhere and I sensed there, though I was willing to leave its working out to the dialectic of conversation, a clue.

"I was going to ask *you* what you thought of (*pause*) Hal's stuff. Why do you change the subject?"

I could not tell him that the subject had been decided in nights he had no way of knowing, that I could not let him deviate from his role, deputy for the dead; for his sense of himself, his pride inhered in other meanings, alien to me; and our first encounter had given him the advantage of the insulted, made it impossible for me to practice on him the slightest nuance of personal offense.

"Hal had no integrity," I said instead, "if you will allow that somewhat simple-minded word. Not that he was ever bought by anybody outright, you understand, for he'd always half-sold himself before the offer was made. He was an outsider to the crassest kind of commercial stuff, only as a child is, that is, he was dishonest ineptly. That clumsiness he tried to pass off as honesty—but a little practice and he began to pass unnoticed among the hacks, keeping only a minimum of stridency for sentimental reasons, nostalgia."

"You're a coterie (*pause*) writer, jealous of his ability to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

popular. Popularity is no crime; the trick's (*pause*) to sell them what they don't know they want. Look at Howard (*pause*) Fast."

"I forgive you the interruption. I was going to say that stridency is not truth; it's not even a guarantee of earnestness, and I can't admire (*you* brought it up) the sort of cunning that slips across a currently unpopular brand of philistinism."

"You're talking about politics, I suppose."

"Yes, a sneaky kind of politics, literary politics, this business of hijacking bourgeois notions, and proving that it's just as comfortable —and dull, on your side of the barricades. If you only—"

"I (*pause*) suppose you don't like Steinbeck." He moved his face over against mine until we were mutually quite distinct despite the blackout.

"No."

"Ah—that's the (*pause*) test. That's the test."

We changed our course violently and before the quasi-automatic bend of the knee had made an adjustment, our viscera rolled with the baffled surge across which we were cutting, trying to escape the body's changed momentum that moved now with the ship, making with all engines its perpendicular to where the guts had thought they were going.

"Why are you ashamed when you refuse a drink?" I asked him again.

"Oh, Jesus," he said, "you can't make a case of it. I don't want any (*pause*) one to go thinking that I have scruples against drinking aboard ship. It's just that at (*pause*) sea, I get sick if I—"

"What are you afraid of anyhow? What would you betray if you seemed virtuous for a moment? You ought to have scruples against it. I do. It's against Navy Regs, and even, though I grant you it sounds like a contradiction, against good sense. It's undemocratic besides, because the men can't do it, and its—"

"But *you* do it," he cried unawares, and then embarrassed, "Not that I care one way or the other. What the hell—"

This time I beat him to the pause. "You're scared of your most hopeful reactions. Give them a chance. I know you didn't choose your naiveté, but you're lucky, it sticks to you. Exploit it! exploit it! because if you don't it will fester on you, make you a special super-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

damnation. Did you ever hear of the theory of Uneven Development?"

"That's some Trotskyite theory, isn't (*pause*) it?" He said it in a tone of intended rebuff, but he had no faith in it; he was just trying it on for size.

"Can't you see, it's just your innocence that makes you a push-over for propaganda, however sleazy and unsubtle, against innocence. You can't make a career of innocently hating innocence, nor a subject matter of its callow denial. And one thing's sure, you amateur Machiavel, you can't blink *my* sins out of existence, whatever you do with your own."

It must be clear to you by now (I did not intend to conceal it) what motivated my feeling and my speech: the need to make the record once more. For there I had been granted what death had seemed to deny, the possibility of saying what I could not leave off wanting to say; once more, once more to explain, and this time perhaps what had been wounded would be healed; this once at least words might eventuate in understanding.

It was to Hal I spoke (how, precisely, had I lied to that old woman when I told her that I believed in his ghost? But that was the riddle of my pilgrimage) on that unforeseen deck, as I had spoken on streets I could scarcely remember through nights whose motives had become as alien to me as history. Dan was no Hal, after all, but there seemed reasons to subpoena him for the role, to externalize my long lonely debate as chance allowed, in whispers and without lights. In the end, he made quite an acceptable ghost.

"Esoteric crap," he said, "I won't buy it."

"You're trying," I told him, "but you just don't have it in you, not real offense, not the arrogance of Hal; and maybe it'll save you, just that lack, for all your posturing; twist the arm of your insolence till you yell, 'Save me!' No, not that ultimate, lucid, unconvertible arrogance, not the arrogance of the Jew—"

That hurt him, and I must after all have intended it. Having chosen his way of somewhat chic dissent, Dan fell inevitably among Jews and they (any Jew sensed it in a moment) offended him; not at any level where reason could emend or learned tolerance temper the distaste, but at a tribal depth of aversion immune to argument, almost beyond the grace of confession. His consequent self-distrust

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conditioned his whole political program, touched it with hysteria, until it seemed a function of his disguised uneasiness, an apology continually tendered for a complicity never admitted.

"Jewish—Oh Lord, not *Jewish!* What you call arrogance, what made (*pause*) lesser people uncomfortable about Hal—is self-knowledge, certainty of power, the hallmark of the great writer al(*pause*) ways, always, the supreme insolence of Milton, of your precious (*pause*) Joyce!"

In a way it was true; and I was sickened, not at the poor logic of the epigone that takes the master's flaw as central to his success, but at our common lot that flaws the noblest animals of us all. We were both embarrassed then, he at the unforeseen rejoinder of silence, and I as when some gauche stranger touches in his fumbling spite the unconfessed focus of one's disgust with the loved, corrupt family.

I did not answer but submitted to the power of the night that we patterned briefly with our wake, and to the arched lovely failure of the water from our sides, *our* failure, the unutterable dark falling of us all.

In combat Dan did not act well; he seemed to need the confirmation of anecdote for an essentially unmotivated depth of anxiety, and he would report each day outrageous casualties ("Oh, I've seen the official figures, but—"), confide unrecorded monstrous errors of command, unconfirmed deaths of people we knew and half-knew. "You remember *him*; he was leaning against the Coke machine the night we played (*pause*) chess. Both legs! To the groin!"

His stories were never true; some unconscious scruple kept his fantasies pure of fact, except as oblique allegories of his own despair, and that, to be sure, the rest of us shared in varying degrees, so that we hated him for making clear to us our own grounds for self-despite.

"Jesus, old skull-and-bones is here!" someone would yell at his approach, and we would dash off on suddenly remembered errands. Sometimes I could summon up a kind of sympathy for his hunger in that ill-defined untidy violence, for precise distress; but he vulgarized past all participation what he felt, falsified at last his essential self.

We moved in different directions after that Operation, and it was fourteen months before I met Dan again in the Officers' Club at Pearl Harbor. We scarcely paused to greet each other, but leapt

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

viciously and with deliberation into a political argument, while drunks carefully piloted their flushed, impervious heads between us, or howled across our recriminations, recognitions and farewells.

I was a little drunk myself for I was going home, but scarcely drunk enough to excuse me. I slipped off for the bar and a drink in the midst of one of Dan's ungainlier sentences, and when I'd managed to get back through the crowds that would yield me headway only as the begrudged resultant of its own gay, purposeless thrust and heaving, he had disappeared.

Dan is not his name. I should in any case have had to call him for the story's sake some name not his; but I swear I do not remember, though he cued my pilgrimage, brought me to that door and my beginning, what he was really called.

## II

I was still drunk when I got to Frisco, drunk enough to take the curse off the land's rigidity; the pavements without resilience, the inelastic rigor of the horizon seemed to roll with me; the eye was slaked in its own humors. The foot has an unexpected nostalgia for oceans; it is easy, you know, walking a deck to time the stride so that the whole dark, spongy mass of the sea seems to sink with the foot's falling, rise at the release of the sole's pressure.

But it is not only the illusion of mastery of what one walks that is lost leaving water; the lines are heaved on to the splintering dock with its colloidal fringe of garbage in oil-slick, are made fast; and one declares to the uniformed inquisitor that he returns to arid cities and the accustomed flora of his childhood bearing only a) one Jap pistol (decommissioned) b) three rolls of silk (red) c) two ounces of perfume (cheap) in the carved Koa wood container. With so slight a confession, one is shriven, perhaps forever, of the Proustian ennuis of the sea, its architecture of terror, the loveliest uses of leisure and solitude.

As always at one point of my drunkenness, sweating out toward nausea the inevitable binge of coming ashore (for one cannot move directly ever from shipboard to the landsman's land you others possess without effort, but must pass, as the sandhog upward from muck to daylight, through the decompression chamber of the sailor's city: the whitewashed storefronts behind which one gets a bath for a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quarter, the unambitious whores, the fourteen-year old world's champion tattooer, the joints—and over all the shuttling passage of gulls. But it is not all defined by the waterfront; it invades your quiet territory and you do not know it. In the washrooms of stations where you make the train of your daily homecoming, the homeless drunk swabby flushes his face with water, slaps it, leaning so close to the mirror that his forehead bangs the glass lightly to the rhythm of his blows; or where you stop for an after-theater drink, the place with mirrors, some j.g. slips absurdly off his stool, but you do not laugh being polite and almost sober), I could not help remembering my first time drunk: Hal had taken me to Carrie's house for dinner, to the center of his secret, and afterwards we had opened the liquor.

I must have been sixteen; I remember I was reading the *Critique of Political Economy* and Aragon's *Red Front,* just then Englished by E. E. Cummings (we passed it hand to hand under desks in Geometry class; the teacher was myopic, scared—and we, who, with indifferent zeal, wrote stories about the *rive gauche* and poets and *pernod,* or at lunchtime yelled "Hug-a-dick!" from the second storey windows of our school, despised her), still preferred ice-cream to beer, myself to both, and shaved once a week the intolerable boy's mask of my face.

Carrie (we called her that only in the boot-legged jest, and, despite this whole history, I cannot write it yet without a sense of secret insolence), Miss Carrie Overbury Stone, had been my Latin teacher; she was a specialized type, a specimen rare then and that does not now, I think, survive, except in the jokes with which some no longer young revenge the pieties of their adolescence. There was in her a quiet core of faith in authority, an assured expectation of obedience and respect that gave those abstractions we were desperately challenging, in her bland, firm presence, an irrefutable status which we could not afford to remember behind her back.

To be sure, one can sense now the motives of respectable poverty that drove her, the trivial story of a family suddenly gone, the lover dead, and the slow accretion of boredom and inarticulate wretchedness as the days that did not move, moved without love through the regimen of bells, the chalk and the young faces, anonymous under their youth and their ignorance of death, toward death.

But as deep as our eye went then, she seemed a triumph of func-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion over flesh, as if she had composed herself to the tailored pattern of her role out of one of those bags of useful scraps women keep for mending. From beneath the careful repose of her face, she surged out magnificently to an undivided shelf of bosom, then dropped in an unruffled, gentle slant to the brief bifurcation of the legs beneath the discreet length of her skirt; one could imagine her only as homogeneous under the dark dresses, whalebone and silk and silk and whalebone as deep as one could go—certainly not real breasts or the legs cleft to the dark, living warmth of the crotch.

Carrie and Vergil are confused in my remembering; they impugn each other, the poet's cool, tenebrous elegance squandered on his incomprehensible allegiances (how could we who marched past the bored hostility of cops with banners, "Free Tom Mooney and the Scottsboro Boys!" or wrote the leaflets against war and fascism that they broke open our lockers to find, believe in the mysteries of a homeland discovered or the decorous sweetness of death in battle), and the insult of the teacher's yellow smile, unbearably tolerant of the boy's fumbled translation. "Not bad, but will you try next time, please—to *prepare* your lesson."

Even the cool tolerance was, we soon learned, for boys only; the tentative equilibrium of adolescent girls was always in peril under Carrie's blue, ungenerous stare, that reduced all their gaiety, their motives of rebellion, their crowding of maturity to the mere evidence of an expected, gauche viciousness. She would bait the girl who faltered or turned to the calling of her name a face still meshed in some soft, trivial reverie, gently smile that incredulous smile, wait in silence and with the offensive composure that no kid can attain or outface, until there welled up in the victim, after the start to attention, the excuses—tears! Then while the door still swung gently after the retreating girl, whose heels we could hear, distinct in the empty corridors, running, running—Carrie would turn her bland gaze back to the rollbook, to us. "Well—Miss Kaufman, are *you* with us? Line 23, please. *Agnosco veteris vestigia flammae.*"

Or sometimes when we looked up suddenly, while one of us was turning into the unlanguage of recitation the quandary of the Hero, his imperatives elsewhere and son and comrade to remind him, but his flesh trapped in the cave with the hot Queen to whom he was no more than what she fondled (Oh Lord, we could not know yet how

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it concerned us; footnoted by scholars and parsed by virgins, the text seemed foreign to what we were after in the parked car, pushed silently down driveways while our fathers slept, the warm, damp, inexpert fretting toward a consummation scared and unconvinced: "Well, got my ashes hauled, dunked the love-muscle," the smug, depreciatory metaphor), we could see that Carrie had slipped noiseless from the room, left unbroken the mechanical train of translation.

"That day first of joy and first of evils the cause was—was the cause; nor indeed by appearance and by reputation moved, not now secret love Dido meditated—no longer did Dido meditate secret love: marriage she called it, and with this name covered—uh—'culpam,' " the reciter paused and queried for the word's forgotten meaning the desk whose emptiness he now first noticed.

" 'Sin,' you jerk!" someone whispered from behind him.

"Yes, 'sin,' " Carrie repeated at the door again, "though perhaps 'blame' would be better or 'guilt.' 'Culpa-guilt,' it's a word that should be familiar to you all by this time."

We knew where she had been, had learned to note in a slight sucking-in of her lips the confession of triumph. The odor of cigarette smoke had reached her finicky nose from across the hallway, and she had pounced, caught in the girls' toilet some furtive smoker. We could see how, under her eye, disinfectant as the deodorants that purged that grey room, the blithe adult non-conformist had shrunk, while the lip-stained cigarette whirled, soaked and shredded in the toilet-bowl, into the small girl, frightened and insolent; and our hum and titter as Carrie settled behind her desk was a kind of contemptuous applause that she acknowledged hushing it.

But Carrie had fallen in love with Hal. Hal who was in her class then, lean, with those pale eyes that showed in photographs blank and smoky as marbles, would walk beside me home from school, trying on attitudes, justifying. "Oh my God!" he would cry, striking his chest with the impossible Wolfe-ian gesture, and tilting toward the sky the head that might be, if it survived its apprenticeship, someday noble, "I'm not *laying* her, you know. I've only kissed her once." We stopped for Napoleons at a bakery shop, and our talk up the untidy avenue blurred in the cream-filling and the flakes of dough.

"But you're a whore. That much is clear."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All right, I'm a whore! A sweet, green revolutionary whore full of jism—a lucky, smart whore you'd give a complete set of Lenin to change places with."

"No—I don't think so. It's hard to be sure, but I really don't—" I was a damn sight more certain than I sounded, but I dared not say so; I dared not. I bang the desk now with that little muscle on the underside of my palm, grown tough from such banging, but I cannot redeem that pastness. Hal had taught me envy and envy unnerved me; when I had first met him he was writing little stories for boys' Sunday School magazines, and afterwards fishing pieces for *Field and Stream*; later there would be those deliberate compositions that would win prizes in National Collegiate Writing Contests ("There's always a formula—any jerk can learn it, if he can learn anything!"), while I could still only hope that my continued clumsiness was the warrant of some scruple guarding from premature success a talent that would not die with the boy's undifferentiated itching. And so I never dared open myself to the reproach of envy, to say simply, "It is wrong, *wrong*. I certainly would not do it."

I could not seem to advocate virtue, to play the Pharisee for truth's sake even. Confined to the resources of the sneer, the blasé wink—or else acceptance, I ignored the possibility of saying, "I despise *and* envy you; let us forgive one another," but endured the rewards of callow pragmatism, tried in my embarrassment the kid's conventional irony: "Not me! I'm too young for such glory!"

"He's too young—He doesn't think so! All one-legged blasphemers of Jesus, he doesn't *think* so. Listen! you'd like the three-volume edition of Proust boxed, a subscription to the *New Masses*, orchestra seats to a play every week and cocktails after the show—"

"Not a purely intellectual appeal, I see. The flesh is—"

But he didn't stop for my interruption; it was as if his demonstration that he came dear at least beyond the customary par of contempt, depended not only on the sum of these items, but on the speed of the telling, the impact of their totality. "A new casting rod, concerts, operas, and—maybe (I'll have your testes if you tell this to anyone)—just maybe, Harvard!"

"And what's your quid pro quo, and how many fingers does it take?"

"Fingers! Fingers! the crudity of the rising generation, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

filth of the mind beneath that fair exterior, that child's brow, that lamb's eye, that—Christ, I give her precisely—nothing!"

I laughed.

"Oh laugh, you bourgeois in disguise. The virtues of the untempted! I hold her arm; I sit next to or across from her; I smile. I kissed her once. Forgive me, Father!"

He stopped to do an elaborate version of what he took to be pious grovelling in the middle of the crowded sidewalk, and an old woman, half-blind behind her packages, careened off his rump. "Madame," he whispered into her ear, stooping with her as she picked up her scattered oranges, "your slip is showing!" And she watched down the street the exaggerated motions of our arms against the low sun. *"Meshuggah,"* we could hear her mutter, *"toit meshuggah,* crazy ones!"

But I would not leave it. "You don't," I had a poor vocabulary for most things not insolent in those days; the traditional words that make ethical discourse possible I handled like obscenities, "I *mean,* don't you feel a demand on you for some reciprocal—well, to 'love' her?"

"I do *not!* Oh, I'm sorry for her in a way, but she's a mean and ignorant old bag, and you know it. It's enough I give her something to practice her dammed-up love on before it chokes her. Hell, how many sons love their mothers? Mostly I think she's old and scared, and now at least she won't have to die alone—she thinks."

Rehearsing this, I am able to believe that he must have loved her a little, that he lied out of that dark, trivial compulsion which drove him always to demean his motives, to seem rather thoroughly foul than a little the fool. So later when the Moscow Trials and Spain had made Stalinism impossible for anyone politically literate and no scoundrel, Hal continued grinding out for Radcliffe alumnae those soggy little Morality Plays at the end of which some hoarse Party functionary would appeal improbably for funds to keep the boys of the Lincoln Battalion in cigarettes; and to my explanation, my protests, he would turn a shrug. That shrug had grown for him his essential response, not the traditional Jewish shrug, sly, incorruptible, comic with its self-inclusive contempt, but a parody of that, mocking its mockeries, a little smug. "I know things aren't exactly kosher; don't be a chump! But who controls all the real channels of the kind

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of publication we're after. The Commies, right?" and his face, the boy-scout as villain, would almost wink.

What tenderness he felt lived underground, confessed in signs I could not then read: perhaps the growing edge of irritation that flawed his voice, the cumulative failure of feeling in him and his compensatory rhetorical excess (he came to *shout* what passion he claimed, like some actor, deaf and blind crying desperately his unheard lines to an audience whose presence he cannot verify); just so the guilt he would not otherwise acknowledge was betrayed in the acne along his back that sent him periodically scurrying for the doctor's reassurance and the sunlamp.

Certainly he was brusque and condescending to Carrie that night I first had dinner at her house; his leg hooked over the arm of the chair, the precise casualness of the cigarette ash tapped off on to the rug's dead center mocked the anxious charm of the suburban apartment, the lonely terror of its tidiness.

When Carrie (Hal called her that insouciantly enough though never without a glance at me, while I, who could say neither that nor "Miss Stone," called her nothing) gave me in brief greeting her hand, I saw with a start of pity and repulsion, in the mottled flesh slack between her knuckles, the age the firmness of her face denied; and I could sense in the instant pressure an entreaty for tolerance shameful in its abandonment.

"Good evening," she said and I, "Good evening," and we sat in mutual discomfort, so patently the lay-figures in a demonstration (she could foresee and fore-suffer, I suppose, the unremitting insolence with which Hal would continue to thrust upon their intimacy my arrogant young hunger for "material." He needed, for there was in him fatally a drive to turn what was most private into the Performance, the commandeered cognizance of my envy and contempt; and so we would play, whenever I returned to Carrie's house, a curious game, mutually unconfessed: looking for a manuscript, let's say, Hal would open a drawer, showing me over his shoulder his own pajamas obscenely folded away among Carrie's dark, familiar clothes, or he would leave slightly ajar the bedroom door, "Excuse us for a moment," behind which he was discussing with her his allowance; or he might set carelessly open on the table beside me the latest letter from Carrie: " . . . forgive a silly old woman, and when you've

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

finished this, tear it up, scatter it to the ocean, leave my poor secret to the sea!" and I never managed to refuse to come, to peer, to endure the ignominy of eavesdropping), while Hal beamed at us and nodded and nodded and beamed.

The beginning of the evening was a history of failures at communication for all of us, and for me, the particular strange business of my hands; dry and inept they betrayed an embarrassment my head surely did not share, and I watched them with a detached wariness, prepared to wince at their blunders, as at the gaucheness of friends one has at the last minute inadvisedly taken along on a visit.

"Carrie's just got back from a trip to Russia," Hal would begin.

"Yes, it was most interesting. I really think—"

"Oh for God's sake, not your political opinions, Carrie! The Schoolmarm's summer abroad," and Carrie, silenced, would try to dissolve in the deliberate vagueness of a smile the clumsy act of aggression and her inability to resent it. Then, for a little, silence.

Or Hal would lean toward me suddenly, "A little different than Vergil class, eh?"

"Yes, a little different."

"A damn sight different."

"I can't get used to it." I unknotted my hands that had clasped themselves unwittingly in pointless, gnarled despair, "I can't get used to it."

"Carrie brought back some Vodka," Hal said, "pretty potent stuff, no crap. We'll try it later."

It seemed a prospect, a promise and I smiled for it. "I'd like to. I've never tried the stuff myself."

There was more, but it was no use; we finally turned to the bookcases, caressing the sleek new backs of the books Carrie had bought for Hal; in their dust-wrappers still, all equally shiny and unabused, they seemed a little unconvincing, like the virgin array the local bookstore lends to the amateur dramatic group for its interior set; but touching them we evoked the hope that their bright, mechanical surfaces might someday be subdued to use. Meanwhile they remained merely—loot.

We could hear Carrie messing about in the kitchen as we looked, and that somehow kept our words sparse, our tone subdued, though

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hal would make from time to time in the direction of her noises, a series of incomprehensible confiding nods and winks.

Dinner was good; we ate steak full of gross, sweet bloodiness, meat cut from the dark genital regions of beasts not butchered by pious Jews. Always at Carrie's we ate steak or shell-fish; what to our believing grandfathers had been abomination, and to our rationalist fathers somehow still distasteful, had for us a delicate flavoring of the unclean, a charming *soupçon* of venial sin.

But the drinks were the evening's meaning and until they were in us we could not unspell our disparate tongues. We'd had a shot of Carrie's oldest rye before the meal, choking discreetly only a little, and red wine with the dinner and after, liqueurs, brandy, Curaçao, Benedictine, Aquavit, not choosing one but some of each, then more—The new liquor cabinet was Hal's toy and we tried everything with secret belches and false cries of ravishment; afterwards we went back to the Rye and then Vodka straight and a little Dubonnet, and then the mixed drinks. It made no difference; we disliked the taste of all of it equally and over us hung the fear of not getting drunk enough, of seeming to hold back.

Boys will drink anything in their anguished flight from childhood, but our elaborate and jejune fall was motivated by more than the mere impulse to leave no sense virgin, more even than the simple hunger for evil—the sickening sweet plunge toward absolute abdication of the will.

You will not believe, perhaps, how little we said to each other in those preliminary stages beyond the necessary common denominator of requests and acknowledgments.

"Rye?"

"Yes!"

"Gin?"

"No!"

"More?"

"Please!"

More audible than speech, our breathing, the creaking of a chair under us, the sound of ice and glass, flesh and wood possessed the apartment until it seemed a whore's room, without conversation, alive only with the mechanical noises of a minimum satisfaction.

By the time Hal, wavering like wheat in the floor's center, had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

begun with large expert gestures from which occasionally a glass would fall, break unnoticed at his feet, to mix drinks: Alexanders, Mint Juleps, an improvisation we called the Little Joe ("It kills you!")—we broke into speech.

"Gin is vulgar," Hal said. "There is *nothing* more vulgar than gin!"

"You read it in a book," I told him, "a book you'd be afraid to be caught reading. Snobbism!"

But there were suddenly tears in Carrie's eyes, more guessed at then really seen behind the concealing discs of brightness on their wire frames. "The sons-of bitches," she crooned softly, "the sons-of-bitches! How those old women, pitiable old women, are talking about me. Whispering!" She could not have been drunk really, for she had matched us only one drink for four or five, sadness glinting off her amusement like the light off those opaque lenses, our absurdity and her love anomalous in their common dilemma.

"Sons-of-bitches is masculine," Hal said reproachfully.

"True, but at least it's the correct plural. For that we must be grateful. There are some vulgar louts who say 'son-of-a-bitches.' *That* we frown on." It seemed very important to me.

"That we frown on," Hal echoed, clasping me about the shoulders and we frowned on it together, friends forever, gallantly in the fading light—

"Life in that school is getting impossible for me." The improbable cigarette, snuffed, dropped from her hand. "I swear I shall—" she searched for the apt word in our dull eyes, rigid in their pretty pink orbits.

"Revolt!" we told her, "Rebel! Throw the bosses off your backs!"

We taught her the words of the "Internationale" and marched for her, rather decorously we thought, though the furniture insidiously attacked us, fluid and unfaithful, across the genteel room, the hump of the world, singing it. " 'Tis the final conflict. . . . "

The barricades were up and our warm blood gleamed at us from the rug's softness, from the bottles' secret ambush of color. Oh, they were all proud of us!

And we were proud of each other; we loved each other so; trapped in our singular integrity, we faced without tears the conspiracy of the unjustifiable world.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sons-of-bitches," cried noble Carrie.

" 'Whatever brute or blackguard made the world,' " quoted gallant Hal.

And I lost myself in a phrase of Baudelaire, the real clue, I knew in that instant, to everything: *"l'insolence de la nature."* But the tenth time I tried to repeat it, it was suddenly gone; I had forgotten it and the terrible unfairness of it all brought me almost to tears. But they stood by me, my understanders, my comrades—

We had all grown smaller, more distant in the expanding, unstable room; we could see each other only by propping our eyelids open with our fingers, straining, straining. And above us our heads, soft and swollen, bump-bumped the ceiling in a pulse of escape. They were so little, so dearly little, so dear!

All the splendid things we would do, the astounding rapes, the bright revenges, the dazzling explorations of sensibility, the poems, the disorders, the sighs were there, palpable forever between us. "By God!" Hal cried for us all, "By God By God By God!" And the phone rang.

It was my mother; we could hear Carrie softly lying to her in the foyer, and the greyness that had fogged until then only the room's harsh, limiting corners closed in upon our central splendor. "Yes. Yes. They've just left. It should be another fifteen minutes, I suppose. Yes. Goodnight."

I imagined in her pauses my mother's worried voice, sleep-blurred and querulous, and behind the voice the anguish of her unreal possession (for only melancholy and pride enwombed me now and forever), the obsessive picture of my broken body, fallen from bridges, bruised by trucks, riven by lightning, open to the inner alien lake of blood that she had fed and could drain now only in the inverted wish of fear.

I did not understand then, splashed on the chair's plush, intolerably bloated and weary, the contempt that Carrie must have felt, nor her terrible joy in it, for the failure of real mothers, who give neither the golden present nor release, but exact for warmth, for animal nourishment and prose comforts our endless indulgence and a ridiculous allegiance to childhood. But Carrie in return endured the indignity of the lie, that absurd complicity with boys.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I felt, whirling toward sleep's center in the homeward taxi (I had not heard Carrie call it—focussed for a moment only as the lights snapped up and I gave my address), a nausea at all tendernesses of women; and Hal and I fell apart, cleft down our center of communicating brightness by the dark, by cold and the cab's lurching, hurled each to his window, each at last to his own home.

I moved through the dark rooms from the door to my bed, kicking a chair in muddied resentment, while my mother pretended to sleep, unwilling to offend me further by seeming to have waited up for my return and my father coughed in his sleep beside her. Meanwhile Hal (I thought dimly, falling, falling) was settled now into the female darkness of his fatherless house, around him the small rustling breaths of his sisters and the smell of urine from the bed of his cancerous mother, fitfully swooning from her long pain; and Carrie (I knew as sleep twitched from me my poisoned body) lay, forgetting Hal's uneasy jerk from under her hand's farewell pressure and the emptiness of the hallway after us, proud of what she possessed, in the blackness, alone.

I have been as drunk since though rarely enough to recall each episode: once at a Christmas party in a shoestore in Philadelphia while the star salesman, a fairy, blushed and squealed, goosed by the nightstick of a corner cop, and one of the stocking girls puked over a railing on to the Porter who lay, his leg broken, on the basement landing; once at a Junior Officers' Mess on Saipan where the rats would leap at us when we went out to make water at the edge of the boondocks, and Dogherty with whom I had been arguing Canon Law, slipped suddenly from the wavering level of my sight, only his hand frozen on to the bar in a baffled gesture toward the triple whiskey he had ordered to beat Closing; once in Shanghai with a couple of Korean girls who played the drums and had no hair on their bodies; and in Ann Arbor the night someone had poured perfume into my drink and I punched two holes in the wall. They were all of them satisfactorily bestial, degrading; and yet they failed me, they failed what I remembered of that night at Carrie's.

To begin with, one learns to like this drink more, that less; to abide, in part at least, the etiquette of such abandonments. The very throat is conditioned by memories of nausea, and one submits to an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

imposed pattern of drunkenness; having learned that he is the Surly Drunk, the Maudlin or the Lustful, one imitates, even past the will's collapse, his last time's self, is, hopelessly, the expected clown, the looked-for animal. But there is another dimension—

If one is lucky, he may make once, no more, the pure Adamic fall; know the headlong tug of that unspeakable gravity of which our earth's pull is the mere metaphor and the endless falling of dreams a hint only: the abominable beauty of assent to evil and the obverse of terror and contrition, what I chose to call then a hangover, and what was, after a little, just that. For in time, we are too atomized, too harried, too distrait even to sin purely; demons no longer tempt or torment us, but leave us contemptuously to habit's turgid allure, the dull reproach of our viscera.

And we haunt mechanically the unretrievable revelation, to know again good and evil, to be assured that we shall surely die—but are merely drunk, laid, hated or hanged. The boy's orgy at Carrie's was for me, though it is only now that I know it clearly, such a vision; and the war, strangely familiar, verified its intuitions; that the face of the comrade blurred to the assassin, the face of the assassin to my own could not surprise me, and I woke from the war as one wakes from the familiar, dank bed of his drunkenness.

But not yet—Not until I had left San Francisco, its rock angled upward from the tenderly possessed waters of the bay, acute almost to hysteria under asphalt and past the elegant bars, the untidy bohemias with a view; not until the train had made the noise of its passage among the unnoticed, night-time mountains, while we threw from the doors our empty bottles, imagining their long pointless arc into the black, and the rabbit's small leap of fear at their splintering; not until we had swarmed, sung and sweated the train's innards into a world for our four days' waking and sleeping.

We ate seldom, for the lines in the Diners were too long and we were done with waiting; but we drank when we could, timing the M.P.'s passing or huddled in washrooms, without love or good humor. At the longer stops, we would race to buy liquor up the melancholy alleys that reached vaguely toward the heart of an unrecognized city, the anonymous lanes of violated snow between warehouses and all-night restaurants; or sometimes we would dose ourselves with the acrid coffee of station lunch-counters, endlessly mopped by the grey

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rag of the waitress fighting sleep under the hegemony of the huge visible clock, sober up enough to redeem the sense of becoming drunk.

We shared the air, the toilets, the thin trickle of water from the wall-spigots, those delights of children whose asses we patted as they went by us with their precarious papercups, back and forth to the bored mother smelling of their excrement. There was not enough of anything, only of time too much, but I at least was not bored. (An old man, clean and nervous, sat opposite me for a while between two jerkwater stations, tearing a Crackerjack box to pieces, mathematically, doggedly in his scrubbed fingers; when he caught me watching him, he shrugged and said, "What the hell else is there to do," but he thought I was kidding him when I answered, "Have a drink.")

There was always a card game to sit in on, and after nightfall somewhere a group singing.

Some of us would sing for a while our own songs, the ballads of our recent exile and parochial contempt:

*So it's bless, bless, bless, bless them all*
*As over the fantail we fall. . . .*

but it would not work, the ironies badly sung seemed only obvious, and it was as if no one had ever really gone over the fantail to the unimaginable gullets of sharks. Only the Sewanee River mattered, that long, long trail and the little brown church in the wildwood.

*Oh come, come, come, come!*
*Come, come, come, come!*
*Come to the church in the wildwood. . . .*

How mean our common culture is: these few songs, some verses learned before the eighth grade, the faces on picture-cards and the tops of Dixie Cups, the slogans on cereal boxes—no more, except the debased comradeship of shared trite viciousness. All else we are or know divides us, and sensing it whenever the music lapsed, we would turn from each other in terror after the last chorus, as the meaningless racket of the wheels recurred, filling the interstices between our alien heads.

At night the card games adjourned to the men's toilets; the soiled mothers, the grandparents with their thumb-marked snapshots, the workers moving to new cities faded from us like the obtrusive

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

detail of landscape from the frames of the windows. We inherited the train, homecomers, strangers from battles with names and nameless islands, our Discharges folded in our pockets. Only the aisles, defined by the inhuman smell of the green baize curtains, linked our car-end brightnesses; the weary porters dozed beside us, and the occasional sleeper aroused for pissing, blinked in dazed hostility, knew he was in another country.

Very late, after the whiskey was gone and the last bottle broken, we would fumble along the cramped swaying corridors toward sleep, and the whores would be after us, stretching between curtains their restraining hands from upper berth and lower. "Come on in, Honey!" "Up here, Dearie!" "Oh, stay away from her, she's no good!" "Try *me,* Honey!"—louder and louder until the M.P.'s were all around us, nudging us on, "For God's sake, hit the sack, we gotta sleep too," and inspecting the girls' bunks just to be sure. And the whores would scream after them, "What is this, a *jail?* Son-of-a-bitches!"

In the morning, we would wake from the begrudged few hours of sleep, flush down the drain our last night's joy and regard briefly, among the suspenders, the toothbrushes, the litter of crushed papercups, our lathered images that rocked from sight and the razor to the gut-bucket rhythm of our onwardness.

In a matter of two days we achieved customs, almost a profane morning ritual. "How'd you do last night, Sam?" we would yell to the Porter who was tucking away with agile trembling arms our linen, "Get in, Sam?" and he would make the invariable response: "I feel like the wrath of God. I feel like the wrath of God." Just at that point, the large reddish Marine who slept above me would leap to the floor with a thwack of his bare feet. "Glad my mother didn't have no daughter," he'd say and wait, blinking in his green skivvy-shirt, for some stooge to ask him why. "Cause she'd be a whore!" and he'd wallop his thigh with such animal, innocent astonishment at his own wit, that we could never forebear laughing, our day's first laughter, without geniality but short of malice.

As the last day of our trip darkened, I had an intolerable urge to talk; for four days I had scarcely said more than, "That beats, take the money!" or "Skip the water in mine this time," the undangerous predications of one who belonged, and I was tired of my disguise, ashamed of the cowardice that prompted it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So, I've proved something," I said to the Wac in the seat beside me.

"That's great, Mac," she said, figuring, I suppose, another drunk. She looked no better than I did after the long haul, her hair limp, the pores in her face distinct and dirt-clogged, beginning to break out. I had a sense of what an artificial and inconclusive victory is our customary individuation of faces, how much a function of soap and barbers; a spell of fatigue and poor washing in a common environment and we resemble each other dully like peasants, regress to the shared specific face.

"Or maybe I haven't. I mingle unnoticed with the multitude. No false whiskers, no putty in the nose. It's the disguise of anonymity. Like the postman in—Do you read detective stories?"

"I've read them."

"But there was one Private Eye who had me spotted all the time. He wrote the scoop on a post-card and mailed it at Atlantic City, along with a box of saltwater taffy, to himself. But just wait till he gets hungry again, he'll know all! Know what his name is?"

"Whose name?" She didn't seem very interested, was writing her own name with the grey tip of her fingernail in the dust on the windowsill.

"Kitty's a nice name," I said.

"It sure makes this a happy day for me that you like it. Whose name?"

"Ah, you follow me. The detective's name, of course, the shamus who knows. It's not Hercule Poirot, not Peter Wimsey or—But let me be brief. It's me, *me!* That surprises you; you start with amazement, turn pale; you're breathing hard—"

"Yappity-yap-yap-yap," and her plump dirty fingers made the sign that goes with it.

"Sorry."

"Whyn't you buy us a drink?"

"A great idea," I said, "I need one!"

"Like I need to go back to Yonkers." She was a card, you see, one of those plump girls, besides, with a body that seems not built by food, but rather the function of simple sexual selfishness, a kind of monument of accumulated animal experiences made flesh.

We went to the Parlor car and had a drink, then another; I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

found her eyes curiously unpleasant. "You never knew Hal, at least!" I was still capable of feeling that it was an abrupt opening, but it seemed a point worth making somehow.

"What Hal?"

"Any of them. Me, for instance—"

"Knock it off! Your name's not Hal."

I agreed; it was not a question on which I was prepared to take a firm stand. We were moving through that part of Pennsylvania where the obvious flowering of fire from the blast furnaces is anyone's spectacle, and Kitty's face turned toward it, from me to the orange lambency and the high, dark air in which it was lost.

"I had a theory once that Hal had sold himself to the Devil. Wrote a story about it, a sort of a Faust story. It made sense, of a kind. Given the transaction, at least the cancer was not, you know, idiotic, but Hell's taking up of its options—"

"Oh, are you a Catholic?" She fingered the chain about her neck, the links dipping toward the hidden cross, uneasy symbol for me; when I was a kid, I used to dream of having a woman, naked except for that sign between her breasts—all pogroms revenged!

"I don't know."

It must have seemed a sappy answer to her, but she was still staying; she looked hopefully at her empty glass, and, in answer, I rolled mine off on to the floor where it didn't even break on the soft carpeting.

"Now, it seems to me to have been chiefly a question of value, of the confusion of value and price. When Carrie proved to Hal so neatly that money could buy the things he really wanted; I don't mean merely Things, but real satisfactions in the outward shapes of Things: books and music and drunkenness—that mean pathetic ancient bitch (The eyes of the girl flickered and slipped from focus; she was drunk too and I had not realized it; the dark sheathed us both in its indifferency) who had everything less than Hal, except—money, how could he keep from believing that the measure of all he might do, of all anyone did ever was that, and that, the only undeniable reward, the redemption of the outsider. Money. But the joke was (I leaned toward her oily lost face for the last confidence, the cream of the jest) we thought we were Communists. Communists! Revolt! Rebel! Throw the bosses off your backs!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I was yelling at the end, and it had become clear to Kitty that there were no more drinks in it for her; she heaved herself from the seat, that fat flesh quivering a little. "Shit on you, Karl Marx!" she said, and left me there to the laughter, the train's racket, the dark, and closing in on us now, closer, closer, the threat of homecoming.

III

I came up into New York as into daylight and I had not expected it. It was as if, after the long noise of the plane's coming, its guns' inauspicious patter, and at last the bomb's brief screaming—there was the explosion; yonder; seen and not for us; off our beam the bright flowering; a spectacle merely and not what we had dreamed of and waked to the engines' usual trembling, and dreamed again and waked, saying, "Not yet, not really, not this time."

I was, to begin with, sober; for sleep had sapped me unawares at the trip's ending and I awoke after arrival, under the Porter's hand, spared all false farewells, to a pleasant haze of collecting my gear, checking it, being separated. Coming from such utter sleep to another initiation, my last Navy pay in my pocket and the cheerful, unreal literature of the Separation Center, I felt a child with the bribe of ice-cream in a world of well-intentioned adult liars; all deceit, I almost cried, is a function of love!

The day, after the languors of the train, was so full of quick detail, endless wherever one entered. Besides, there was sunlight on the city, a diffuse and hearty whiteness that the streets bore well, with a dirty nobility I had not foreseen. Given the noise of the wedding, the sentimental cries of relatives, the conspiracy of lights, the veil on the sluttish bride seems not an irony, but, well, sufficient!

Briefly the image of my wife, I confess it, interpolated itself among the stone faces of buildings, but briefly only; I denied it, for I knew where I must first go, the willed What among all given, unchosen ends to which I must return.

I was going to see Carrie. Dan, Kitty, the sea, the protests of whores and the failures of enemy fire (List the influences on the Romantic Movement. Comment on one. Where does the will begin?) had prompted me through ten thousand miles and the recurring ambiguities of choice, but chiefly, I suppose, I had been driven by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

memories of my complicity, the guilt of having abetted Carrie's fantasies, without madness, out of something more cowardice than pity.

I had last seen Carrie just before leaving the States, having been able to find no way to avoid the meeting; for I had turned up in New York with a month of leisure before departure in the guise of an additional training course (we learned the names of obscure islands, did push-ups on a windy roof and adjourned to the bars and theaters) and Carrie knew it.

"Carrie wants you to come see her." "Carrie would like to see you. She's read your poem about Hal's death." Friends and half-friends, moved by versions of tenderness or vicarious curiosity, would return from their intrusions into the rooms where she abode her loneliness to badger me. "Why don't you drop in and see Carrie. She lives right down in the Village now."

That much I knew; I had even been to visit her once with Hal after her improbable transplanting. She had moved there from the suburban apartment of my first drunkenness when she resigned her job to become, in one of those extraordinary total commitments of women, completely what was of use to Hal. I used to try to imagine her sometimes in that anomalous setting, bending her worn blandness to the new orthodoxies of the *Nation,* enduring whatever chic camouflage of her love Hal might demand.

She had not given up the flat, even to make her hopeless adventure in California; and when she had flown back to New York with Hal, already full of his death though ignorant of it, to become, he thought, assistant to that radio writer he had always admired, it was ready. And she closed her life in upon its darkened center after he, not believing it and in much pain, had died.

I did not want to go. What love Hal and I had shared, what redeemed for us our disparity, had dwindled from meeting to meeting, from letter to letter. The goat-cry he had liked to fancy swelling to his lips in New York or Chicago still swelled, he wrote and it did not surprise me, in Ann Arbor and in Cambridge (for a moment his upward career had been in danger when he flunked the Harvard entrance exams, but he had got there finally, Carrie's check in hand, via two years at Michigan, moving onward past the block to his breathless, absurd ending); and from France or Germany, where he bicycled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

summers, the essential news was the same: the boy's loneliness, the goat's anguish, the dog's despair.

At first he would share with me the circumstantial data of his predicaments, whatever, susceptible to contempt or political sentimentality, was within the range of his sensibility: the fraternity boys singing their outrageous loyalties as he washed their dishes (at Ann Arbor he played the role, larger than life, of the working student, and though later he came more and more to depend on Carrie's generosity, the attitudes and assurances of that time persisted, permitted him to feel the Proletarian even in Eliot House); the Party-line Professor of Classics ("A real all-around man! I met his mistress in New York.") voting belatedly death to the Fascist Socrates; the girl he had most lately kissed ("Eighteen years old and she kept her mouth closed. Closed, by God!") who left him for an ROTC Officer: all that would permit inexpensive cynicism or the profanation of accepted values.

We began by revenging on the ordered world its exclusion of ourselves, but we came to love the revenge for its own sake; what exposed, demeaned, desecrated we needed as evidence for what we had guessed by its rejection of us, the world's unworthiness. We chose not to belong, though they would not believe us, we *chose* it! We did not wear the Phi Beta Kappa keys we had won though we mentioned them always, jeering.

What enthusiasms crept, despite our wariness, into our letters, we would mutually belabor with elementary irony in the style we were currently reading, in Schoolboy French, or in our mother tongue, the abusive endearments that never palled: "You goddam self-torturing, Jesuitical fart, Hail!"

It was I, I am afraid, who betrayed our common cause. In the first place, I married Vivian ("I take it," Hal wrote, for it was to him the only plausible motive, "the wench is with child!"), and then there was my Ph.D., an article in PMLA, a job teaching to Freshmen the discriminations of logic and commas.

Moreover, I could not abide the disjunction of what I lived and believed, the minimum disaffection of cynicism; could not, like Hal, continue the strategy of pretending to despise my accommodations and retreats. Toward what was pious and bourgeois I moved, perhaps with something of hysteria ("the last neurotic hunger," was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hal's exegesis, "for normality"), yet singly, at least, and I came to terms, blushing and glancing over my shoulder, with platitudes and gentleness. Behind there was Hal fixed in my abandoned attitudes, a wax-works of reproach and boyhood; and what in that wax head I might address I could not really imagine.

Of Vivian, in particular, I could tell him nothing ("Vivian sends her regards" and in return, "Give my regards to your wife." He would never trouble to remember her name), how we had discovered quietnesses in ourselves that we had not known we were imploring and were content, and how where desire failed we did not. No one, I suppose, has ever been so startled at the simple chastity of marriage, and if the motions we made in its honor were to the outsider's eye stuffiness and selfish withdrawal, that was the eye's error and not the meaning of the dance. (I do not mean to tell you, where I am saying so much, that our marriage was all blitheness without blemish; the collapse of ourselves would startle us sometimes into mutual assault, or the obdurate heart suspect the gimick of peace, try sullenness. But that could be to Hal all the less confessed.)

So Hal and I abandoned presentness, fell back upon the pitiful lien of recollection, piously naming the situations in which we had once, or thought so, achieved oneness. What we both knew we confided over and over, what we could not evoke we named; no ghosts came to us but we stubbornly haunted our unreal pastness. The true pasts with which we were still continuous we mutually ignored; they had lived underground, under our friendship, and only now, after the fact, we discovered what we had been meaning and had not known how to suspect.

We cried each to himself "deceived" and "deceiver" to the other. Only where we hurt we knew that we had touched one another, and we stuttered incredulously, bitterly toward alienation.

Toward the end, after a year of silence which had to do for the tentatively composed avowals of hostility that we never quite sent, I had a note from Hal asking for a street map of Ann Arbor where he had been at school, and I had met my wife, married and was then living. "I'm doing a story . . . " his offhand tone, not amiable but assuming amiability, denied the motives of my embarrassment. Unwittingly or not the request mocked me, and though I resolved to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

send the map, I kept forgetting it and forgetting it, until I had, with some relief, lost his address.

On his very last communication to me, Hal had scrawled only his name; it was the program for a production of *Waiting for Lefty* put on in some seedy Boston Hall by a group of fellow-traveling Harvard students, all conspiratorially listed under obvious pseudonyms: George Spelvin, Homer Stoopnagle—but Hal, who had a small part ("Why that son-of-a-bitch is my own lousy brother!") had, with spectacular arrogance, used *my* name.

There was a not quite accountable shudder in seeing that familiar constellation of letters (spelled correctly, too, in added insult) on the alien sheet. In what precise sense Hal understood the joke I had no way of knowing; what in it was insolence, what a claim, what the inversion of love I did not then concern myself with sorting out. Chiefly, I resented what I felt as the offensive camaraderie of the blackmailer, exacting something: tenderness or embarrassment, identification or begrudged affability, for a dated and unprofitable complicity.

I suffered from an excess of pride that was especially vulnerable, secure in having made a real escape from the implications of our adolescence, sure of having discovered motives outside the flight from innocence, or that fear of allegiance which protects the outsider from rebuffs and love. This pride I called humility.

"Comrade, Comrade," I would have told Hal, "I no longer share your lonely country. Bus drivers greet me, knowing my stop; I buy wood for my fireplace, and I practice before my mirror the harmless face of the bourgeois." But I could not reach him, and I touched Vivian instead, who was beside me, fingering her shoulder, her pale red hair, the real evidence of belonging and peace.

"Hal?" she asked, looking at the envelope in my hand, at me troubled. She used the names of people she knew only from my memories with a familiarity I found charming and that was to her somehow an assurance.

"Yes—Hal. If that joker was a ghost he would haunt me."

"No danger," she said, "he seems very much alive."

"He'll never die. It would be out of character."

I believed that then, in a way, as much as I had ever believed anything, and when, astonishingly, Hal lay dying at the age of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

twenty-three, I wrote him once more out of the bewilderment that cancelled all my attitudes, long unused anyhow and grown almost unfamiliar. I could scarcely recall his face, certainly not evoke it revised by death's imminence. He had returned to boyhood to die, and only I was absent, far-off, not writing and harried.

It was a difficult time for me. For three years I had been writing poetry, finding in marriage a warmth and illumination eager to be words, a break in the inhibiting coldness that had preceded it; but I had suddenly, inexplicably dried up and I was scared.

It was one of those times when one feels with a deep, quiet certainty that he will never be able to write again. I read detective stories frantically, suffered from piles and athlete's foot, discovered that my hair was growing thin, and, rereading my three years' body of work, found it a few cries toward an impossible conversion, no more.

There was the abortion, too—or perhaps it was all essentially that. In my resolve to have no children, the whole residue of fear that had survived my induction into responsibility monstrously prospered. To be sure, I told myself, there are juvenile decisions that are resistance merely, against which our current stutters, is heat: to cry against marriage and marry, to damn the community and surrender to it is normal; one even learns to play Bridge; but this last, delicate scruple cannot be abandoned for all that is baffled when body and body are sundered always by the intervention of some discreet machine.

We scarcely felt the bafflement for a while, being yet each other's explorers, crying to each other from pinnacle or declivity what vistas we had discovered or what darknesses. But the real end of such coupling is not knowledge only, and afterwards it irked us: the month's end niggling worry, the delays of preparation, the dull constant peril (we defined it so) at the core of joy.

"Oh, Goddam it," I cried when we were, despite all, in the usual terrible phrase, "caught," "Oh, Goddam it!"

"It wouldn't be so horrible a thing after all to have a child." Vivian smiled ambiguously out of a face lumpy, green eyes marred with the drug we had been vainly trying. "My ears ring. My mouth's sour. I'm tired! tired! and I shall never put one of those uglinesses between my teeth again. I can't. I can't."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I swear you really *want* the brat," I cried exasperated, and full of a pity with which I could not come to terms, but let break from me in rage. "You've wished this on us."

"What if I have? What then?" She sat down, lurching a little, as one surrendering, undoing her words.

"Oh Lord, don't cry, don't cry," I railed at the tears of weakness that brimmed and broke, brimmed and broke past letting (I thought incongruously of a stopped toilet-bowl, the greasy inevitable rise and overflow of slow water) at her eyes' margins. "I hate tears. I hate women who exploit them."

"And I hate you!" she wailed, grabbing me, kissing me, kissing me, until I tasted the taste of her mouth, the drug's taste inhabiting her. We trembled together as if what scared us were not ourselves, but we were rather its solution, and crouched, I could feel the articulation of her pelvis, bone against my bone, imagine the monster that would swell her presently, innocent in its bloody caul.

I could not tell her my vision: the slow terror of being a child, and the inevitable fall to hair, to awkwardness, to evil from that imbecile partial grace; how I could not will that indignity for any not myself. I talked, instead, of money, of our unstable life, of all the weak, customary lies against parenthood. And I ended by smashing a chair against the floor, splintering the legs, strewing about us a pattern of sawdust; and I cried out that I wished I were dead but I did not wish it and the ebb of my anger was fear, and I said in my aching head, "I did not mean it!" and aloud to my wife, "Have it, damn it all, let's have the thing. God save the child!"

Next day she aborted, and for forty-eight hours I could not touch her, remote on the sour bed where she composed and recomposed the meaning of her hair against the pillow. I watched her faintly granulated eyelids flicker over the pupil's paleness and I thought I did not like her, weak and mourning a meaningless puddle of blood. But when she reached toward me, in a known fragile gesture, her hand, I knew it was I that she mourned and I said, "Dear, dear," kissing the rise of that breast no kid had tugged, and I suffered the tender insult of her pity.

So I was assailed on one side and on the other, by the threat of birth, by the threat of death, and they debouched both in death's actuality, though I did not yet believe that Hal would really die for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all the whispers of cancer, and I would not confess that that Thing, our Thing, that blob, ginder, scarcely organized excrement, lost like a nosebleed, flushed with a wrist's flick from being, could be said to have died.

Before that time, I had felt death only as a threat to myself, *my* defining predicament, and though in that alone there was pain enough to make me cry out from my pillow or wince secretly in the day's brightness, there was the ready metaphysical solace: for death seen thus was its own defeat, would die with me. Beyond there were only notions of hell to which I was not prepared to subscribe.

All who had meaning for me were living still, and so there had been no decisive test for the ancestral taboo I exploited, the privilege of the Jewish priestly line never to look upon the dead, inscribed in the unread Law as a command, but for me a refuge, a device of profane grace. I had seen an old man once plunge with a lost grey face downward toward the ice, an arm's length before me, and when I heard the mutter about him, "Dead!" I had changed my direction, walked swiftly away, my eyes fixed on the motion of my own living feet.

The bogus piety of the act, its fastidious selfishness distressed me, but it protected me as well (and this at some level I knew was worth great expense of spirit) from reconsidering the problem of birth and fatherhood, from reading the other side of terror, its obverse of responsibility. It was a sort of virginity I chose, a connoisseur's virginity, unnoticed by the laity.

And yet when I heard that Hal was dying I wrote to him, but he was dead before my word reached him, leaving me with an unreasonable sense of having been rebuffed, a feeling of guilt and incompletion—even a little anger.

"I never even saw your letter. I can't imagine what became of it," Carrie told us. We had gone at last to her apartment, Vivian and I (Vivian I brought along thinking that she might inhibit to some degree excesses of intimacy, displace any easy identification of Hal and me on Carrie's part), hoping until the last committal click of the opening door that Carrie would not be at home. "I saw little of his—or him toward the end." She sat with her hands neatly fallen into her lap, will-less, patterned, as she had been since rising briefly to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

let us in, and would chiefly remain until we left. She seemed to glow faintly in the unnecessarily darkened room. "Very little."

"I feel baffled," I said, "baffled, as if I had stretched out a hand and there was no one there. No—I mean more; as if there were no place for one to be, so that one felt beyond disappointment, shame at an unjustifiable miscalculation. If he had simply *chosen* not to answer, it would have been something meaningful at least, a snub, a—"

"He would have answered you, of course."

"Well, surely, but I meant—" It didn't seem worth bothering with what I might have meant; I was afraid that I had offended Carrie, let my voice's lapse serve as a retraction. I could hear Vivian's chair creaking a little; uneasily, I thought. I did not look at her.

"He withdrew—I think really *they* drew him away from me at the end, his family, and at the very—just before—you know, he was almost a baby, clung like a very little child to his mother, those sisters."

"You don't mean to say that his mother is alive, by God. I'd always thought that she had cancer, was at the point every minute of—"

"She had no cancer—only the fear of it. But he, without fear—" She stopped for a while, short of the sob I had been expecting. "You know his sister, the oldest one?"

"Rose?"

"Yes. She's, well, she's nothing but a—"

"Whore," I suggested and the word boomed between us, revealing to me how hushed until then had been our voices, though I had felt the whole subdued tone of our encounter as a function of the muted light. There was a provoking hesitancy in Carrie's speech; so many things seemed impossible for her to say: not only the grossnesses she had learned once for Hal's sake to tolerate and the blunt name of death, but the names of Hal's sisters, his own name. For him the simple pronoun, quite without special inflection, sufficed; he was to her ideally the third person singular masculine and for the others about him she had resolved to make do with the grammatical gamut: "I" for herself, "you" for me, "they" for his family.

"He was living with her, that—you know, in Hollywood and I had to fly out to save him. He could do no work, save no money.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A mess of bottles, you know, and dirty dishes. And then she left him, went off with some—"

"He was very unhappy in Hollywood, I was told."

"They didn't understand him. I cooked for him, cleaned and he wrote a little on his own—a prophetic story I'll show you later. But here, afterwards in the hospital, I could scarcely see him. And he held pitifully (they must have scared him) his mother's arm the whole time." She alluded to that gesture with subdued horror, a scarcely mentionable apostasy. "He kept talking about Zionism, the Jews, endlessly the Jews, whatever would divide us—"

"Did he know what was wrong with him?"

"No. I think not. Certainly not at first, even when he was being treated. It started in the throat you know. We told him it was a fungus infection."

"He must have had a terrible will to be deceived. It sounds so phoney."

"Perhaps, but with a Doctor saying it—technical jargon. Then it spread to his—" she faltered, indicating her genital region with a slack gesture and said it after all, "his testicles, and then his brain—"

I thought of the allegorical, the almost theatrical progress of the disease, from seat to seat of his special falls: the sin of rhetoric, the sin of lust, the sin of fear—Oh Hal! But I said nothing.

"It was so fast—And he was so delighted with the job that was waiting for him. In the young it is always fast, and he was very young." She made a scarcely perceptible motion of despair, at the impossibility, I guessed, of our grasping just how young. Her eyes touched Vivian and stayed there, really noticing her for the first time. "You're very young, too. He said so often that he would have liked to see you, to see the 'unlucky girl.'" She smiled dimly, at the reminiscent savor of the poor joke, as well as to remove its offense. "You didn't know him?"

"Not really; but we've talked of him so often, I *feel* as if I'd known him; and his name has always seemed somehow familiar—" Vivian's voice seemed alien in that room, her words essentially false in that context, and I was pleased that it was so, proud of her remoteness from our predicament, knowing that if I alone came forth from that room to blitheness, it would be by her good grace, by virtue of her immunity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"This is he, and this, and this." Carrie indicated with her eyes the walls from whose dimness now sprang a score of Hals, fixed in the grimace of graduation, wet on the breathless beach, alone or between unknown faces. We were in a Hal Musem; in the hung pictures, the sweater (unnoticed till then) flung as if in passing on a chair, the fingered books, the incomplete manuscript on a table, he persisted. One sensed that Carrie moved so little about the flat to leave inviolate the cushion his weight had crushed, the imperceptible print of his step on the carpet's nap. "He is here," she said. "I have him."

"There *is* a real sense of him in this room." It was not so—only a hysteria of reminiscence, a thin willful obsession, lived within those walls, but I, shameless, played up to her last self-deceit.

"Yes," she said, "yes," and I should have marked her outrageous excitement, been wary.

"I have felt him even in places less his than this, a kind of presence, a pressure."

"Yes," she said, "yes."

"That was why I wrote that poem, not willing it, almost under compulsion." That was true in a way, and I resented Vivian's reproachful stir beside me.

"Oh yes, *yes*. I knew you understood. And he is different now and happy." She felt safe; she could confess it at last, the whole intolerable secret; her breath scarcely moved her. "He comes back; he comes here. He has talked to me and he is through with insolence, with (how did you say it in the poem?) 'all imposition of the will.' "

I writhed for my poor metaphor, the accomplice unredeemably now of her self-haunting, "I merely meant a trope, a figure—"

"Yes, he comes; he talks to me." Her eyes moved toward the bedroom, indicating ineffable intimacies. "You *must know*; you've said it so truly. He told me he liked your poem—'beyond the fear of innocence,' so apt, so musical."

"Not *really* a ghost," I tried hopelessly.

"No. No, ghost is a dreadful word. What comes is more than that, no coldness. And I have him." She watched in the consequent silence my embarrassment, and I her precarious triumph, and Vivian our joint failure, and we could say nothing more.

I lied my way out at last, pleading an engagement, edging

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

toward the door as Carrie pressed upon me the little magazine with Hal's "prophetic" story (I read it later, the prevision of death compromised by a prose whose falsity no coincidence of fact could redeem), one of the books Hal had owned ("Take one—any one. He wants you to have it." I chose a copy of Yeats's poems that seemed scarcely read, marked only with his pencilled name), a last look at the pictures; at the very threshold she touched my shoulder, tentatively as if she were not sure that we inhabited the same dimension. Standing, she seemed not thin exactly but somehow weightless. "You have no—" she hesitated intolerably, searching for the precise nuance of gentleness, "children?"

"No. Not yet." It had been six months since the miscarriage, but I winced a little, offered the lying implication of the "not yet" in apology, and Vivian, sensing it, pressed my hand in secret solidarity.

"It would have been—Hal would so have liked it, if—A son of yours, you know, would have seemed—" We stood there about our mutual discomfort, Carrie incapable of leaving off, we unable to depart until she had.

And then, quite suddenly, Vivian and I were in the unmitigated glare of the street, trying to guess in the outer wall of the house Carrie's window, but we were hopelessly turned around.

When we hailed a cab, the driver looked us over disconsolately. "Not Brooklyn," he said, "anyplace but Brooklyn. I always get lost there and wind up in a cemetery, and cemeteries make me melancholy." We laughed all the way uptown in the rear seat, while the cabbie examined us furtively in his mirror, wondering, I suppose, why the hell we looked like that if we didn't live in Brooklyn.

Back in our hotel-room, I kicked off my shoes, stretched out on the bed, regarding through the defining cube of space on whose floor I lay the otherness of the ceiling. Twenty-eight times I had waked to that ceiling, to the too-squareness of the room, the nudity of the walls (we had taken down the hotel pictures the first day, improbable flowers obscenely pink, stacked them in the rear of the closet), the unconquerable impersonal odor that denied the permanence of our tenure.

"Not a noble adventure, I'm afraid," I said to Vivian who stood

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the window, twisting a ruffled edge of curtain idly in one hand, her face turned toward the noise of traffic.

"Definitely not."

"Ghosts, ghosts," I sighed.

"Oh you played up to her shamelessly!"

"Sure I played up to her, poor, cracked thing. What else does she have? You probably ran around giving the other kids the scoop on Santa Claus at the age of three. Don't be so damned sure about ghosts anyhow. There are more things—"

"Oh please. Please!"

Twenty-eight mornings I had waked in that room to the racket of the streetcars and the delicate belching of the city pigeons, Vivian beside me; tomorrow would be the same, the pigeons, the trolleys, the uncongenial smell; only lastness would have been added, scarcely marked in the bustle of packing, but redeeming yet one more triteness to meaning. The day after that I would be gone, shipped out.

And suddenly desire, like an unforeseeable pain, the unwilled recall of a lapsed anxiety, assailed me. Aware dimly of how the secret history of passion proceeds with paranoic disregard of our words, our daylight motives, I rose to touch Vivian (the hushed fall of my stockinged feet gave me a sense of moving from ambush): the discreet resilience of her buttocks, the notched, resisting shoulders, the plump half-arc of breast seen under the arm raised to the curtain; to reassure my hands' extravagant pulsing, to confirm what cued my crouched rigidity.

She swayed ambiguously from uprightness—and I pulled her with me to the bed, thinking that before the final warmth and weariness I wanted to hear the tearing of silk. But when I kissed her I could taste nothing, and I let her roll from me, her unexpected not-thereness, and we lay side by side not touching, identical, our fists balled tight and our chins tilted to the darkness that moved now upon our room from the unseen city.

My awareness of my body had faded, faded almost to nothing, a finger-nail barely touching some leaden surface, the vague sense of distant water, sagging between banks with that intolerable heaviness just before freezing. To feel more would be nausea, and yet I dared it.

"For Christ's sake," I said. "For Christ's sake. What is it?"

"I want to talk to you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"She wants to talk to me! Talk! Just a minute until I tuck my tail between my legs. There are ladies present. Shall we begin our conversation now, or would you rather wait for tea?"

"Don't be a clown, please!"

"What shall we talk about: books, movies, the degeneracy of cities, the negro problem, the—"

"Please, *please!*"

I sat up and banged my fist hard into a pillow: *one,* two, three, *one,* two, three, but it didn't help. "Well?"

"It's ridiculous to try to talk to you now. You've been frustrated for once and you've just lost control of yourself completely. Why must you be so—adolescent!"

There was some truth in it, of course; I ached with what had surged in me and been baffled, despised but could not let my animal resentment. But more, my failure to come to terms with Hal's death, my absurd complicity in Carrie's delusions, my muddled defeat over our almost-child, my cumulative, petty guilts harrassed me. And over all, the next day's fear of loneliness and exile and ennui, impossible adequately to confess or exorcise (one would simply have had to cry, and that relief is perversely forbidden to men among us), was busy with its haunting. There should have been dignity, some calm at least at the heart of departure to redeem it for memory.

"Oh foul," I cried, "unfair!" at the ineluctable untidiness of it all.

And saying, "I'm sorry," Vivian rose, walked over to pluck again the curtain's edge.

I got up and stood beside her, letting the intermittent light of the electric signs below splash my face, like hers, with another violence, noiseless and indifferent.

"I knew him," she said at last.

"Knew who?"

"Knew Hal. Odd that I'd forgotten."

"Knew Hal where? What are you trying to say?"

"I remember now, remembered when I saw those pictures on Carrie's wall. It was at a picnic once in Ann Arbor. He sat beside me. There was a fire, and I think—I don't really recall—he kissed me."

They would fall together now I knew (and the knowing of it was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a vertigo I had dreamed many times before surely) my two lives: Hal's world and Vivian's, the denial of innocence and its affirmation, the boy's fall and the man's grace. It had been a sentimental lie, their disjunction, for *I* had persisted, and I, inescapably my beginning, impugned my end. Unless there was another prayer not yet prayable. . . .

I had imposed upon Vivian, scanting for its sake her real humanity, a role more than human, making her the sign of another dispensation, anti-Hal, a profane salvation. The trivial coincidence of circumstance now revealed was no matter; it showed what I should have known without the exemplum of fact, without so vulgar an epiphany, what was true always: that we inhabit, all of us, the continuous kingdom of evil. But that which should have confirmed and enriched my love for her prompted me to revenge my merited distress on Vivian. I prepared now my utter indignity. "Oh, you *think,* you don't really recall if he kissed you!"

"You're not offended. I saw him only that once. It was, you know, nothing—more Springtime than anything, hardly personal."

"Hardly personal!" I felt shamed taking up her words compulsively with that simple-minded reflex of irony, but I scarcely knew what else to say; there was no way, after all, of justifying for her the sick anger that possessed me. "Perhaps you don't 'really recall' that he took you behind the bushes, hauled down your 'hardly personal' pants and—"

"If you must be disgusting, at least keep your voice down." I had begun to shout a little, and beyond the thin walls that flanked us, we could hear the listeners stirring, old lonely faces, settling now for their evening's excitement.

"Well, did he?"

"Did who what?"

"Did that joker lay you?" When I said it, my voice caught in the distorting whisper, nausea took me, and wrenched apart in the sick spasm, I saw myself, lost, the self-lacerating performer. "Fool," I cried, "weep. Ask forgiveness!" But I would not listen.

"Did he? Did he?" She did not, of course, answer. "Oh, sweet sorrow of parting, those last, lovely, chaste embraces—"

Vivian was trembling; it would have been easy for her to cry, but she preferred anger, would not abandon me even here. "I can't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

answer such questions. I can't even dignify them by hearing them. It would shame *you!*"

"Oh crap! That you forgot him, so completely, unbelievably forgot the whole thing: that's evidence enough!"

"I suppose it was in part willful. You're so odd about such things. But the boy I knew was so different from the myth you've always talked about. Even now it's hard for me to think of him as the same. He was just a boy—goodlooking—"

"Goodlooking!" I welcomed the trivial, offensive word. "Goodlooking. That's your excuse. Justifies all. Explains all. He was 'cute,' too, no doubt. How did you ever miss that word? Would you go so far, Madame Roundheels, as to say that he was 'cute'?"

"You're impossible, *impossible,*" she said, crying at last, too late. "All this disgustingness because for a minute I frustrated you—you spoiled brat!"

"Goddam it, discuss the subject."

"This is the subject. The rest is camouflage and nastiness. Spoiled brat. Didn't get what he wanted."

"Stick to the point for Christ's sake, the point!"

"You're shouting."

"Sure I'm shouting and it never gave me so much pleasure."

"Scream and kick the floor, spoiled brat!"

One can never get quite so lost in the voluptuousness of abuse, the abdication of reason and the surrender to childhood, that he does not see somewhere, miniscule, unblinkable, the absurd shame and waste of his predicament; but he cannot stop.

"Stop it!" I cried, "Please stop it! Repeat that damned name once more and I swear I shall hit you." It was all clear then and unredeemable. She would say those two words, deliberately and with knowledge, as she had to, and my hand would fall without rage or guilt. I had told her.

"Oh, good," she cried, "noblest of animals, the poet as wife-beater. Spoiled brat, spoiled brat."

I punched her in the mouth hard, and she hit the floor before she believed it; a little blood showed between her teeth and she was still saying "Spoiled brat," stupidly. Then a deep sobbing took her, jerking her body that did not resist the dry spasms but danced fantastically on the green carpet.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I was suddenly spent, weary past all belief, and I fell back on the bed telling myself, "I didn't enjoy it! I had to! I had to! I didn't enjoy it!" My right arm quivered senselessly, and looking down I saw that what I felt as a foreign object at its end was my fist, still clenched.

"You animal!" she cried finding breath at last, and lifting toward me her ruined face, the tear-swelled eyes, the marred mouth, "Oh you'll kill this one, too! You'll kill this one, too!" She was sitting up now on the floor, rocking back and forth, her belly cradled in a tender gesture that I could not misunderstand.

"You're pregnant again?"

"I wanted it so—I was going to tell you, to be born while you're gone. Oh, I hate you. No one can do this to me, no one. It's, it's—"

There was no word for that enormity, past speech, past tears; she rose unsteadily, tried silence, pressing her head against the window pane.

"Go wash your face. Put some cold water on that lip." She was so ugly injured, it was almost an offense; that, abominably, I could feel, but to what was crucial, that she had tricked me into fatherhood which perhaps with my blow I had undone, that her need to tell me had motivated our discrepancy of desire, to that I could not respond, dry, dry, dry—

"I didn't know," I said, "I really didn't know."

"Oh Lord, can't you count?" and adding the days I saw that I should have known, that it was so.

"Please, Viv, wash your face." I could not muster pity for her yet, but, uneasy, foresaw that bruised face, anomalous in the crowded station of my departure.

When she returned from the bathroom, from the noise of water and the one overheard sob, her face was shiny and blotched, a new trickle of blood distinct at one corner of her mouth that she had, astonishingly, lip-sticked. "Oh, if you've killed it," she cried. "If you've killed it! How I hate you!"

"Oh, to Hell with it all," I said tired, through with anger.

Those were our last words until I had boarded the train. We slept that night badly (whenever I woke I could hear Vivian's breath, pretending sleep to mock my wakefulness), taut on the double bed, each rolled to his very edge, scrupulously not touching; aching and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

unrefreshed, we sat silent in the cab to the station, walked silent, a space between us, on to the platform.

It was only when the trainmen were bawling departure, the steam swirling about our legs, that I grabbed Vivian and she flowed into me without reserve; the sweet warm darkness of our mouths dissolved us to one pulsing; without forgiveness or pity, we submitted to each other. And we still did not speak. From my seat, the train moving, I saw her below me receding, receding, and her lips made without sound, "I love you" and I called the same, voiceless, to her diminishing image.

I had not killed the child; it was born seven months later, while I was in Pearl Harbor—a boy. I read the letter with the news in the loft-like lounge of the BOQ, between the blurred bleating of the radio and hushed conventional cries of the card-players, and I tore the sheets crosswise, took up again the history of the Medes and Persians that insulated me from the compulsory evening camaraderie, the unremitting male heartiness, and the oblique exploitation of self-pity.

I stood no drinks, bought no cigars. It was weeks before I told anyone, though in the dark I practiced sometimes possible attitudes of acceptance; but I could project nothing susceptible to love, only imagine the monster native to my guilt and anger, thriving grossly at the breast toward eventual power and the realization of his licit hate.

Chiefly I avoided the fraternity of fathers, smokers of cigars, watchers of waist-lines, who would pass from hand to indifferent hand, settling back at the end of dinner, the greasy photos of their kids; none marked really the faces dear to others ("Let me see. You have two boys?" "No, a girl." "Oh yes, I remember, a cute kid."), fixed each in his solipsist, smug idolatry, submitting evidence of potency, the reduplicated image. ("My youngest. Eighteen pounds and only ten months. I think I'll take ice-cream on my pineapple, I skipped the potatoes.")

Vivian sent me a picture of David (the Beloved, a hopeful name), frog's body and the wrinkled dark head of a Filipino, like a nut-meat, making the moue of anguish from a tangle of sheets. I kept it, not knowing why, in my wallet. Once in Kobe, very drunk, I showed it to a middle-aged *geisha,* but when she bent to it the inevitable, honest tenderness of women, *"Ah, kawaii, naaa!* Dear baby!" I jerked it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

away. "Be still," I shouted, "you talk too much," and she bowed and bowed, "I have insulted you. I have committed an offense!" hissing pitifully through her gold teeth.

But the war took my resentment, my regret, my violence achieved or rejected, and played them out as history. Unpurged and without music, I returned to peace, to the States.

Vivian knew I was en route, but I had not wired her the exact time of my arrival. It was no surprise I was planning, but once ashore, I did not know how precisely I could come home to that strangeness. I could foresee our house: disarrayed, hung with drying diapers and small sodden clothes, cluttered with the paraphernalia of purification, folding bathtubs, oils and unguents and powders, to redeem for our finicky senses the lost stinking animal we bore; and over all, the interwoven pink and blueness, the ribbons, the soft, wooly covering that hoaxed no one, while at the center, the child, my son, David, chafed in his two excrements, tried against the incommensurate his only device, yelled and yelled.

And it came to me at the heart of my discomfiture, that the focus of distress was that unforgotten lie at Carrie's; that to set straight the meanings of that encounter, the meaning of Hal, would shrive me of pastness, give me, for what I now addressed, a needed innocence. First, first, I must say to Carrie, "There is no ghost, no haunting not ourselves," then I could achieve return. It was my last self-deception.

I came without music to the street, the house, the door. Unsure, I waited while the bell made its catarrhal squawk in the imagined inner cube of dark and quiet. There was no footstep, no tremor, no pulse of answer; and I noticed, then, the newspapers and the milk-bottles at my feet. Three days, I figured, or four, but before the thought could form "Carrie's gone away"—I smelled her.

I knew familiarly that smell by then, sweetish, turgid, its own definition; it seemed odd only in that context, leaking, thin and singular, through the crack between door and frame. Another day or two, I knew, and the milkman bent to his heedless routine would pause and retch; the janitor, called, insert his passkey in the lock, push open the door, holding his breath, to display darkness and the abominable remnant of Carrie's flesh. I would not call him surely;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I payed to that lonely death my shudder, and walked to the elevator, dropped swiftly from what parleyed in the unimaginable black, no longer my business. To have alone escaped that room seemed a sufficient victory.

Around the first corner I turned, a small girl was bouncing a ball, chanting in time to the throb of rubber against the pavement, "Bouncey, Bouncey, Ball-ee! I hope my sister fall-ee!" Her blonde intent face was screwed to a dwarf's malice, precocious and in that sunlight startling. "Bouncey, Bouncey, Ball-ee! I hope my sister fall-ee!" and I felt welling in me for that congenital, inexpert evil an unexpected pity; knew that even as, with the ball, the wish, she fell, the child was congruous with my imperfect love.

"Bouncey, Bouncey, Ball-ee! I hope my sister fall-ee!"

"I hope she does," I said. It was as simple at that: the state of evil as the world of love, another innocence.

I knew then toward what I was turning, to what surrender my unmarked steps, my hardly believed-in tenderness were bearing me, faster, faster.

This is the apt ending, I thought, but it will not end here; to this revelation no experience can be adequate; this vision I shall accommodate to a hundred shabby betrayals of love; this imperishable capital squander in time. "Home to his Mothers house private return'd." That had seemed to Milton an ending. I could foresee how I would run down the last street, as when I was a boy late from play, be breathless when I arrived, sweating.

But first there would be the subway, a bus, time to figure out why that Miltonic line, incantatory and inapt, possessed me, "Home to his Mothers house private return'd." My suitcases walloped my hurrying legs, "Home to his Mothers house. . . . " They banged my thighs, galling the damp flesh. It was not *my* mother, I thought childishly, "Home to his Mothers . . . " I would work on it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

## José Ortega y Gasset

# ON POINT OF VIEW OF THE ARTS

When history is what it should be, it is an elaboration of cinema. It is not content to install itself in the successive facts and to view the moral landscape that may be perceived from here; but for this series of static images, each enclosed within itself, history substitutes the image of a movement. "Vistas" which had been discontinuous appear to emerge one from another, each prolonging the other without interruption. Reality, which for one moment seemed an infinity of crystallized facts, frozen in position, liquifies, springs forth, and flows. The true historical reality is not the datum, the fact, the thing, but the evolution formed when these materials melt and fluidify. History moves; the still waters are made swift.

## II

In the museum we find the lacquered corpse of an evolution. Here is the flux of that pictorial anxiety which has budded forth from man century after century. To conserve this evolution, it has had to be undone, broken up, converted into fragments again and congealed as in a refrigerator. Each picture is a crystal with unmistakable and rigid edges, separated from the others, a hermetic island.

And, nonetheless, it is a corpse we could easily revive. We would need only to arrange the pictures in a certain order and then move the eye—or the mind's eye—quickly from one to the other. Then, it would become clear that the evolution of painting from Giotto to our own time is a unique and simple action with a beginning and an end. It is surprising that so elementary a law has guided the variations of pictorial art in our western world. Even more curious, and most disturbing, is the analogy of this law with that which has di-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rected the course of European philosophy.This parallel between the two most widely separated disciplines of culture permits us to suspect the existence of an even more general principle which has been active in the entire evolution of the European mind. I am not, however, going to prolong our adventure to this remote arcana, and will content myself, for the present, with interpreting the visage of six centuries that has been Occidental painting.

## III

Movement implies a mover. In the evolution of painting, what is it that moves? Each canvas is an instant in which the mover stands fixed. What is this? Do not look for something very complicated. The thing that varies, the thing that shifts in painting, and which by its shifts produces the diversity of aspects and styles, is simply the painter's point of view.

It is natural enough. An abstract idea is ubiquitous. The isosceles triangle presents the same aspect on Earth as on Sirius. On the other hand, a sensuous image bears the indelible mark of its localization, that is, the image presents something seen from a definite point of view. This localization of the sensible may be strict or vague, but it is inevitable. A church spire, a sail at sea, present themselves to us at a distance that for practical purposes we may estimate with some accuracy. The moon or the blue face of heaven are at a distance essentially imprecise, but quite characteristic in their imprecision. We cannot say that they are so many miles away; their localization in distance is vague, but this vagueness is not indetermination.

Nonetheless, it is not the geodetic *quantity* of distance which decisively influences the painter's point of view, but its optical *quality*. "Near" and "far" are relative, metrically, while to the eye they may have a kind of absolute value. Indeed, the *proximate vision* and the *distant vision* of which physiology speaks are not notions that depend chiefly on measurable factors, but are rather two distinct ways of seeing.

If we take up an object, an earthen jar, for example, and bring it near enough to the eyes, these converge on it. Then, the field of vision assumes a peculiar structure. In the center there is the favored object, fixed by our gaze; its form seems clear, perfectly defined in all its details. Around the object, as far as the limits of the field of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vision, there is a zone we do not look at, but which, nevertheless, we see with an indirect, vague, inattentive vision. Everything within this zone seems to be situated behind the object; this is why we call it the "background." But, moreover, this whole background is blurred, hardly identifiable, without accented form, reduced to confused masses of color. If it is not something to which we are accustomed, we cannot say what it is, exactly, that we see in this indirect vision.

The proximate vision, then, organizes the whole field of vision, imposing upon it an optical hierarchy: a privileged central nucleus articulates itself against the surrounding area. The central object is a luminous hero, a protagonist standing out against a "mass," a visual *plebs,* and surrounded by a cosmic chorus.

Compare this with distant vision. Instead of fixing a proximate object, let the eye, passive but free, prolong its line of vision to the limit of the visual field. What do we find then? The structure of our hierarchized elements disappears. The ocular field is homogeneous; we do not see one thing clearly and the rest confusedly, for all are submerged in an optical democracy. Nothing possesses a sharp profile; everything is background, confused, almost formless. On the other hand, the duality of proximate vision is succeeded by a perfect unity of the whole visual field.

## IV

To these different modes of seeing, we must add another more important one.

In looking close-up at our earthen jar, the eye-beam strikes the most prominent part of its bulge. Then, as if shattered at this point of contact, the beam is splintered into multiple lines which glide around the sides of the vase and seem to embrace it, to take possession of it, to emphasize its rotundity. Thus the object seen at close range acquires the indefinable corporeality and solidity of filled volume. We see it "in bulk," convexly. But this same object placed farther away, for distant vision, loses this corporeality, this solidity and plentitude. Now it is no longer a compact mass, clearly rotund, with its protuberance and curving flanks; it has lost "bulk," and become, rather, an insubstantial surface, an unbodied spectre composed only of light.

Proximate vision has a tactile quality. What mysterious resonance of touch is preserved by sight when it converges on a nearby object?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We shall not now attempt to violate this mystery. It is enough that we recognize this quasi-tactile density possessed by the ocular ray, and which permits it, in effect, to embrace, to touch the earthen jar. As the object is withdrawn, sight loses its tactile power and gradually becomes pure vision. In the same way, things, as they recede, cease to be filled volumes, hard and compact, and become mere chromatic entities, without resistance, mass or convexity. An age-old habit, founded in vital necessity, causes men to consider as "things," in the strict sense, only such objects solid enough to offer resistance to their hands. The rest is more or less illusion. So in passing from proximate to distant vision an object becomes illusory. When the distance is great, there on the confines of a remote horizon—a tree, a castle, a mountain range—all acquire the half-unreal aspect of ghostly apparitions.

## V

A final and decisive observation.

When we oppose proximate to distant vision, we do not mean that in the latter the object is farther away. To look means here, speaking narrowly, to focus both ocular rays on a point which, thanks to this, becomes favored, optically privileged. In distant vision we do not fix the gaze on any point, but rather attempt to embrace the whole field, including its boundaries. For this reason, we avoid focussing the eyes as much as possible. And then we are surprised to find that the object just perceived—our entire visual field—is concave. If we are in a house the concavity is bordered by the walls, the roof, the floor. This border or limit is a surface that tends to take the form of a hemisphere viewed from within. But where does the concavity begin? There is no possibility of doubt: it begins at our eyes themselves.

The result is that what we see at a distance is hollow space as such. The content of perception is not strictly the surface in which the hollow space terminates, but rather the whole hollow space itself, from the eyeball to the wall or the horizon.

This fact obliges us to recognize the following paradox: the object of sight is not farther off in distant than in proximate vision, but on the contrary is nearer, since it begins at our cornea. In pure distant vision, our attention, instead of being directed farther away,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

has drawn back to the absolutely proximate, and the eye-beam, instead of striking the convexity of a solid body and staying fixed on it, penetrates a concave object, glides into a hollow.

## VI

Throughout the history of the arts in Europe, then, the painter's point of view has been changing from proximate to distant vision, and painting, correspondingly, which begins with Giotto as painting of bulk, turns into painting of hollow space.

This means there has been nothing capricious in the itinerary followed by the painter's shift of attention. First it is fixed upon the body or volume of an object, then upon what lies between the body of the object and the eye, that is, the hollow space. And since the latter is in front of the object, it follows that the journey of the pictorial gaze is a retrogression from the distant—although close by—toward what is contiguous to the eye.

According to this, the evolution of Western painting would consist in a retraction from the object toward the subject, the painter.

The reader may test for himself this law that governs the movement of pictorial art by a chronological review of the history of painting. In what follows, I limit myself to a few examples that are, as it were, stages on such a journey.

## VII

*The Quattrocento.* The Flemish and the Italians cultivate with passion the painting of bulk. One would say they paint with their hands. Every object appears unequivocally solid, corporeal, tangible. Covering it is a polished skin, without pores or growths, which seems to delight in asserting its own rounded volume. Objects in the background receive the same treatment as those of the foreground. The artist contents himself with representing the distant as smaller than the proximate, but he paints both in the same way. The distinction of planes is, then, merely abstract, and is obtained by pure geometrical perspective. Pictorially, everything in these pictures is in one plane, that is, everything is painted from close-up. The smallest figure, there in the distance, is as complete, spherical and detached as the most important. The painter seems to have gone to the distant spot where they are, and from near at hand to have painted them as distant.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But it is impossible to see several objects close-up at the same time. The proximate gaze must shift from one to the other to make each in turn the center of vision. This means that the point of view in a primitive picture is not single, but as many points of view as there are objects represented. The canvas is not painted as a unity, but as a plurality. No part is related to any other; each is perfect and separate. Hence the best means of distinguishing the two tendencies in pictorial art—painting of bulk and painting of hollow space—is to take a portion of the picture and see whether, in isolation, it is enough to represent something fully. On a canvas of Velasquez, each section contains only vague and monstrous forms.

The primitive canvas is, in a certain sense, the sum of many small pictures, each one independent and each painted from the proximate view. The painter has directed an exclusive and analytic gaze at each one of the objects. This accounts for the diverting richness of these Quattrocento catalogues. We never have done with looking at them. We always discover a new little interior picture that we had not observed closely enough. On the other hand, they cannot be seen as a whole. The pupil of our eye has to travel step by step along the canvas, pausing in the same point of view that the painter successively took.

## VIII

*Renaissance.* Proximate vision is exclusive, since it apprehends each object in itself and separates it from the rest. Raphael does not modify this point of view, but introduces in the picture an abstract element that affords it a certain unity; this is composition, or architecture. He continues to paint one object after another, like a primitive; his visual apparatus functions on the same principle. But instead of limiting himself, like the primitive, to paint what he sees as he sees it, he submits everything to an external force: the geometrical idea of unity. Upon the analytic form of objects, there is imperatively fixed the synthetic form of composition, which is not the visible form of an object, but a pure rational schema. (Leonardo, too, for example in his triangular canvases).

Raphael's pictures, then, do not derive from, and cannot be viewed in, a unified field of vision. But there is already in them the rational basis of unification.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

## IX

*Transition.* If we pass from the primitives and the Renaissance toward Velasquez, we find in the Venetians, but especially in Tintoretto and El Greco, an intermediate stage. How shall we define it?

In Tintoretto and El Greco two epochs meet. Hence the anxiety, the restlessness that marks the work of both. These are the last representatives of painting in bulk, and they already sense the future problems of painting in hollow space without, however, coming to grips with them.

Venetian art, from the beginning, tends to a distant view of things. In Giorgione and Titian, the bodies seem to wish to lose their hard contours, and float like clouds or some diaphanous fabric. However, the will to abandon the proximate and analytic point of view is still lacking. For a century, there is a struggle between both principles, with victory for neither. Tintoretto is an extreme example of this inner tension, in which distant vision is already on the point of victory. In the canvases of the Escorial he constructs great empty spaces. But in this undertaking he is forced to lean on architectonic perspective as on a crutch. Without those columns and cornices that flee into the background, Tintoretto's brush would fall into the abyss of that hollow space he aspired to create.

El Greco represents something of a regression. I believe that his modernity and his nearness to Velasquez has been exaggerated. El Greco is still chiefly preoccupied with volume. The proof is that he may be accounted the last great foreshortener. He does not seek empty space; in him there remains the intention to capture the corporeal, filled volume. While Velasquez, in *The Ladies in Waiting* and *The Spinners,* groups his human figures at the right and left, leaving the central space more or less free—as if space were the true protagonist—E. Greco piles up solid masses over the whole canvas that completely displace the air. His works are usually stuffed with flesh.

However, pictures like *The Resurrection, The Crucified* (Prado) and *Pentecost,* pose the problems of painting in depth with rare power.

But it is a mistake to confuse the painting of depth with that of hollow space or empty concavity. The former is only a more learned way of asserting volume. On the other hand, the latter is a total inversion of pictorial intention.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What we find in El Greco is that the architectonic principle has completely taken over the represented objects and forced these, with unparalleled violence, to submit to its ideal schema. In this way, the analytic vision, which seeks volume by emphasizing each figure for its own sake, is mitigated and neutralized, as it were, by the synthetic intention. The formal dynamic schema that dominates the picture imposes on it a certain unity and fosters the illusion of a single point of view.

Furthermore, there appears already in the work of El Greco another unifying element: chiaroscuro.

## X

*The Chiaroscurists.* Raphael's composition, El Greco's dynamic schema, are postulates of unity that the artist throws upon his canvas;—but nothing more. Every object in the picture continues as before to assert its volume, and, consequently, its independence and particularism. These unities, then, are of the same abstract lineage as the geometrical perspective of the primitives. Derived from pure reason, they show themselves incapable of giving form to the materials of the picture as a whole; or, in other words, they are not pictorial principles. Each section of the picture is painted without their intervention.

Compared to them, chiaroscuro signifies a radical and more profound innovation.

When the eye of the painter seeks the body of things, the objects placed in the painted area will demand, each for itself, an exclusive and privileged point of view. The picture will possess a feudal constitution in which every element will maintain its personal rights. But here, slipping between them, is a new object gifted with a magic power that permits it—even more—obliges it to be ubiquitous and occupy the whole canvas without having to dispossess the others. This magic object is light. It is everywhere single and unique throughout the composition. Here is a principle of unity that is not abstract but real, a thing among other things, not an idea or schema. The unity of illumination or chiaroscuro imposes a unique point of view. The painter must now see his entire work as immersed in the ample element of light.

Thus Ribera, Caravaggio, and the young Velasquez (*The Ador-*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*ation of the Magi*). They still seek for corporeality according to accepted practice. But this no longer interests them primarily. The object in itself begins to be disregarded and have no other role than to serve as support and background for the light playing upon it. One studies the trajectory of light, emphasizing the fluidity of its passage over the face of volumes, over bulkiness.

Is it not clear what shift in the artist's point of view is implied by this? The Velasquez of *The Adoration of the Magi* no longer fixes his attention upon the object as such but upon its surface, where the light falls and is reflected. There has occurred, then, a retraction of vision, which has stopped being a hand and released its grasp of the rounded body. Now, the visual ray halts at the point where the body begins and light strikes resplendently; from there it seeks another point on another object where the same intensity of illumination is vibrating. The painter has achieved a magic solidarity and unification of all the light elements in contrast to the shadow elements. Things of the most disparate form and condition now become equivalent. The individualistic primacy of objects is finished. They are no longer interesting in themselves, and begin to be only a pretext for something else.

## XI

*Velasquez.* Thanks to chiaroscuro, the unity of the picture becomes internal, and not merely obtained by extrinsic means. However, under the light, volumes continue to lurk, the painting of bulk persists through the refulgent veil of light.

To overcome this dualism, art needed a man of disdainful genius, resolved to have no interest in bodies, to deny their pretensions to solidity, to flatten their petulant bulk. This disdainful genius was Velasquez.

The primitive, enamoured of objective shapes, seeks them arduously with his tactile gaze, touches them, embraces them. The chiaroscurist, already less taken with corporeality, lets his ray of vision travel, as along a railway track, with the light-ray that migrates from one surface to the next. Velasquez, with formidable audacity, executes the supreme gesture of disdain that calls forth a whole new painting: he halts the pupil of the eye. Nothing more. Such is this gigantic revolution.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Until then, the painter's eye had ptolemaically revolved about each object, following a servile orbit. Velasquez despotically resolves to fix the one point of view. The entire picture will be born in a single act of vision, and things will have to contrive as best they may to move into the line of vision. It is a Copernican revolution, comparable to that promoted by Descartes, Hume and Kant in philosophic thought. The eye of the artist is established as the center of the plastic Cosmos, around which revolve the forms of objects. Rigidly, the ocular apparatus casts its ray directly forward, without deviating to one side or the other, without preference for any object. When it lights on something, it does not fix upon it, and, consequently, that something is converted, not into a round body, but into a mere surface that intercepts vision.*

The point of view has been retracted, has placed itself farther from the object, and we have passed from proximate to distant vision, which, strictly speaking, is the more proximate of the two kinds of vision. Between the eye and the bodies is interposed the most immediate object: hollow space, air. Floating in the air, transformed into chromatic gases, formless pennons, pure reflections, things have lost their solidity and contour. The painter has thrown his head back, half-closed his eyelids, and between them has pulverized the proper form of each object, reducing it to molecules of light, to pure sparks of color. On the other hand, his picture may be viewed from a single point of view, as a whole and at a glance.

Proximate vision dissociates, analyzes, distinguishes—it is feudal. Distant vision synthesizes, combines, throws together—it is democratic. The point of view becomes synopsis. The painting of bulk has been definitively transformed into the painting of hollow space.

## XII

*Impressionism.* It is not necessary to remark that, in Velasquez, the moderating principles of the Renaissance persisted. The innovation did not appear in all its radicalism until the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists.

The premises formulated in our first paragraphs may seem to

* If we look at an empty sphere from without, we see a solid volume. If we enter the sphere we see about us a surface that limits the interior concavity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

imply that the evolution had terminated when we arrive at the painting of hollow space. The point of view, transforming itself from the multiple and proximate to the single and distant, appears to have exhausted its possible itinerary. Not at all! We shall see that it may retreat even closer to the subject. From 1870 until today, the shift of viewpoint has continued, and these latest stages, precisely because of their surprising and paradoxical character, confirm the fatal law to which I alluded at the beginning. The artist, starting from the world about him, ends by withdrawing into himself.

I have said that the gaze of Velasquez, when it falls on an object, converts it into a surface. But, meanwhile, the visual ray has gone along its path, enjoying itself by perforating the air between the cornea and distant things. In *Ladies in Waiting* and *The Spinners,* we see the satisfaction with which the artist has accentuated hollow space as such. Velasquez looks straight to the background; thus, he encounters the enormous mass of air between it and the boundary of his eye. Now, to look at something with the central ray of the eye is what is known as direct vision or vision *in modo recto*. But behind the axial ray the pupil sends out many others at oblique angles, enabling us to see *in modo obliquo*. The impression of concavity is derived from the *modo recto*. If we eliminate this—for example, by blinking the eyes—we have only oblique vision, those side-views "from the tail of the eye" which represent the height of disdain. Thus, the third dimension disappears and the field of vision tends to convert itself entirely into surface.

This is what the successive impressionisms have done. Velasquez' background has been brought forward, and so of course ceases to be background since it cannot be compared with a foreground. Painting tends to become planimetric, like the canvas on which one paints. One arrives, then, at the elimination of all tactile and corporeal resonance. At the same time, the atomization of things in oblique vision is such that almost nothing remains of them. Figures begin to be unrecognizable. Instead of painting objects as they are seen, one paints the experience of seeing. Instead of an object as impression, that is, a mass of sensations. Art, with this, has withdrawn completely from the world and begins to concern itself with the activity of the subject. Sensations are no longer things in any sense; they are subjective states through which and by means of which things appear.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Let us be sure we understand the extent of this change in the point of view. It would seem that in fixing upon the object nearest the cornea, the point of view is as close as possible to the subject and as far as possible from things. But no—the inexorable retreat continues. Not halting even at the cornea, the point of view crosses the last frontier and penetrates into vision itself, into the subject himself.

## XIII

*Cubism.* Cézanne, in the midst of his impressionist tradition, discovers volume. Cubes, cylinders, cones begin to emerge on his canvases. A careless observer might have supposed that, with its evolution exhausted, pictorial art had begun all over again and that we had relapsed back to the point of view of Giotto. Not at all! In the history of art there have always been eccentric movements tending toward the archaic. Nevertheless, the main stream flows over them and continues its inevitable course.

The cubism of Cézanne and of those who, in effect, were cubists, that is, stereometrists, is only one step more in the internalizing of painting. Sensations, the theme of impressionism, are subjective states; as such, realities, effective modifications of the subject. But still further within the subject are found the ideas. And ideas, too, are realities present in the individual, but they differ from sensations in that their content—the ideated—is unreal and sometimes even impossible. When I conceive a strictly geometrical cylinder, my *thought* is an effective act that takes place in me; but the geometric cylinder of which I think is unreal. Ideas, then, are subjective realities that contain virtual objects, a whole specific world of a new sort, distinct from the world revealed by the eye, and which emerges miraculously from the psychic depths.

Clearly, then, there is no connection between the masses evoked by Cézanne and those of Giotto; they are, rather, antagonists. Giotto seeks to render the actual volume of each thing, its immediate and tangible corporeality. Before his time, one knew only the Byzantine two-dimensional image. Cézanne, on the other hand, substitutes for the bodies of things non-existent volumes of his own invention, to which real bodies have only a metaphorical relationship. After Cézanne, painting only paints ideas—which, certainly, are also objects, but ideal objects, immanent to the subject or intrasubjective.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This explains the hodge-podge that, in spite of misleading interpretations, is inscribed on the muddy banner of so-called *cubism*. Together with volumes that seem to accord major emphasis to the rotundity of bodies, Picasso, in his most typical and scandalous pictures, breaks up the closed form of an object and, in pure Euclidian planes, exhibits their fragments—an eye-brow, a mustache, a nose—without any purpose other than to serve as a symbolic cipher for ideas.

This equivocal cubism is only a special manner within contemporary expressionism. In the impression, we reached the minimum of exterior objectivity. A new shift in the point of view was possible only if, leaping behind the retina—a tenuous frontier between the external and internal—painting completely reversed its function and, instead of putting us within what is outside, endeavored to pour out upon the canvas what is within: ideal invented objects. Note how, by a simple advance of the point of view along the same trajectory it has followed from the beginning, it arrives at an inverse result. The eyes, instead of absorbing things, are converted into projectors of private flora and fauna. Before, the real world drained off into them; now, they are reservoirs of irreality.

It is possible that present-day art has little aesthetic value; but he who sees in it only a caprice may be very sure indeed that he has not understood either the new art or the old. Evolution has conducted painting—and art in general—inexorably, fatally, to what it is today.

## XIV

The guiding law of the great variations in painting is one of disturbing simplicity. First things are painted; then, sensations; finally, ideas. This means that in the beginning the artist's attention was fixed on external reality; then, on the subjective; finally, on the intrasubjective. These three stages are three points on a straight line.

Now, Occidental philosophy has followed an identical route, and this coincidence makes our law even more disturbing.

Let us annotate briefly this strange parallelism.

The painter begins by asking himself what elements of the universe ought to be translated on to canvas, that is, what class of phenomena are pictorially essential. The philosopher, for his part, asks what class of objects is fundamental. A philosophical system is an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

effort to reconstruct the universe conceptually, taking as a point of departure a certain type of fact considered as the firmest and most secure. Each epoch of philosophy has preferred a distinct type, and upon this has built the rest of the construction.

In the time of Giotto, painter of solid and independent bodies, philosophy believed that the ultimate and definitive reality were individual substances. Examples given of such substances in the schools were: this horse, this man. Why did one believe to have discovered in these the ultimate metaphysical value? Simply because in the practical and natural idea of the world, every horse and every man seems to have an existence of his own, independent of other things and of the mind that contemplates them. The horse lives by himself, complete and perfect, according to his mysterious inner energy; if we wish to know him, our senses, our understanding must go to him and turn humbly, as it were, in his orbit. This, then, is the substantialist realism of Dante, a twin brother to the painting of bulk initiated by Giotto.

Let us jump to the year 1600, the epoch in which the painting of hollow space began. Philosophy is in the power of Descartes. What is cosmic reality for him? Multiple and independent substances disintegrate. In the foreground of metaphysics there is a single substance —an empty substance—a kind of metaphysical hollow space that now takes on a magical creative power. For Descartes, the *real* is space, as for Velasquez it is hollow space.

After Descartes, the plurality of substance reappears for a moment in Leibniz. These substances are no longer corporeal principles, but quite the reverse: the monads are subjects, and the role of each—a curious symptom—is none other than to represent a "*point de vue.*" For the first time in the history of philosophy we hear a formal demand that science be a system which submits the universe to a point of view. The monad does nothing but provide a metaphysical situs for this unity of vision.

In the two centuries that follow, subjectivism becomes increasingly radical, and toward 1880, while the impressionists were putting pure sensations on canvas, the philosophers of extreme positivism were reducing universal reality to pure sensations.

The progressive dis-realization of the world, which began in the philosophy of the Renaissance, reaches its extreme consequences in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the radical sensationalism of Avenarius and Mach. How can this continue? What new philosophy is possible? A return to primitive realism is unthinkable; four centuries of criticism, of doubt, of suspicion, have made this attitude forever untenable. To remain in our subjectivism is equally impossible. Where shall we find the material to reconstruct the world?

The philosopher retracts his attention even more and, instead of directing it to the subjective as such, fixes on what up to now has been called "the content of consciousness," that is, the intrasubjective. There may be no corresponding reality to what our ideas project and what our thoughts think; but this does not make them purely subjective. A world of hallucination would not be real, but neither would it fail to be a world, an objective universe, full of sense and perfection. Although the imaginary centaur does not really gallop, tail and mane in the wind, across real prairies, he has a peculiar independence with regard to the subject that imagines him. He is a virtual object, or, as the most recent philosophy expresses it, an ideal object.* This is the type of phenomena which the thinker of our times considers most adequate as a basis for his universal system. Can we fail to be surprised at the coincidence between such a philosophy and its synchronous art, known as expressionism or cubism?

* The philosophy to which Ortega refers, but which unfortunately he neglects to name, is obviously Husserlian phenomenology. (Translator's Note—J.F.)

(*Translated from the Spanish by Paul Snodgress and Joseph Frank*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

## Louis MacNeice

# THE WINDOW

Neck of an hour-glass on its side—
    Hermitage, equilibrium.
The slightest tilt and a grain would glide
    Away from you or towards you;
So without tremolo hold this moment
    Where in this window two worlds meet
Or family voices from the room behind you
Or canned music from beyond the garden
    Will irrupt, disrupt, delete.

Between this room and the open air
    Flowers in a vase imponderably—
The painter knew who set them there
    The knack of closed and open;
With highlights upon bloom and bulge
    He hung this bridge in timelessness
Preventing traffic hence and hither
And claimed his own authority
    To span, to ban, to bless.

The sands of light within, without,
    Equated and inviolable,
Allow no footprint and no doubt
    Of savagery or trespass
Where art enhancing yet revoking
    The random lives on which it drew
Has centred round a daub of ochre,
Has garnered in a square of canvas
    Something complete and new.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So there it rests the clump of flowers,
Suspension bridge and talisman,
Not his nor hers nor yours nor ours
But everyone's and no one's,
Against the light, flanked by the curtains
No draught nor chatter can discompose
For this is a window we cannot open
A hair's breadth more, this is a window
Impossible to close.

Thus pictures (windows themselves) preclude
Both ventilation and burglary—
No entrance to their solitude,
No egress to adventure,
For life that lives from mind to moment,
From mouth to mouth, from none to now,
Must never, they say, infringe that circle,
At most may sense it at a tangent
And without knowing how.

II

How, yes how! To achieve in a world of flux and bonfires
Something of art's coherence, in a world of wind and hinges
An even approximate poise, in a world of beds and hunger
A fullness more than the feeding a sieve?
For the windows here admit draughts and the bridges may not be loitered on
And what was ecstasy there would be quietism here and the people
Here have to live.

Beginning your life with an overdraft, born looking out on a surge of eroding
Objects, your cradle a coracle, your eyes when they start to focus
Traitors to the king within you, born in the shadow of an hour-glass
But vertical (this is not art),
We feel like the tides the tug of a moon, never to be reached, interfering always,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And always we suffer this two-way traffic, impulses outward and
images inward
Distracting the heart.

And the infant's eyes are drawn to the blank of light, the window,
The small boy cranes out to spit on the pavement, the student tosses
His midnight thoughts to the wind, the schoolgirl ogles the brilliantined
Head that dazzles the day
While the bedridden general stares and stares, embarking
On a troopship of cloud for his youth or for Landikotal, evading
The sneer of the medicine tray.

Take-off outwards and over and through the same channel an intake—
Thistledown, dust in the sun, fritillaries, homing pigeons,
All to which senses and mind like sea anemones open
In this never private pool;
The waves of other men's bodies and minds galumphing in, voices
demanding
To be heard or be silenced, complied with, competed with, answered,
Voices that flummox and fool,

That nonchalantly beguile or bark like a sergeant-major,
Narcotic voices like bees in a buddleia bush or neurotic
Screaming of brakes and headlines, voices that grab through the
window
And chivvy us out and on
To make careers, make love, to dunk our limbs in tropical
Seas, or to buy and sell in the temple from which the angry
Man with the whip has gone.

He has gone and the others go too but still there is often a face at
your window—
The Welsh corporal who sang in the pub, the girl who was always
at a cross purpose,
The pilot doodling at his last briefing, the Catalan woman clutching
the soup bowl,
The child that has not been born:
All looking in and their eyes meet yours, the hour-glass turns over
and lies level,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The stopwatch clicks, the sand stops trickling, what was remote and
raw is blended
And mended what was torn.

And how between inrush and backwash such a betrothal should
happen
Of tethered antennae and drifting vanishing filament
We do not know nor who keeps the ring and in passing
Absolves us from time and tide
And from our passing selves, who salves from the froth of otherness
These felt and delectable Others; we do not know for we lose ourselves
In finding a world outside.

Loss and discovery, froth and fulfilment, this is our medium,
A second best, an approximate, frameless, a sortie, a tentative
Counter attack on the void, a launching forth from the window
Of a raven or maybe a dove
And we do not know what they will find but gambling on their fidelity
And on other islanded lives we keep open the window and fallibly
Await the return of love.

## III

How, yes how? In this mirrored maze—
Paradox and antinomy—
To card the bloom off falling days,
To reach the core that answers?
And how on the edge of senselessness
To team and build, to mate and breed,
Forcing the mud to dance a ballet,
Consigning an old and doubtful cargo
To a new and wayward seed?

But, hows apart, this we affirm
(Pentecost or sacrament?)
That though no frame will hold, no term
Describe our Pyrrhic salvoes,
Yet that which art gleaning, congealing,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sets in antithesis to life
Is what in living we lay claim to,
Is what gives light and shade to living
Though not with brush or knife.

The painted curtain never stirs—
Airlessness and hourlessness—
And a dead painter still demurs
When we intrude our selfhood;
But even as he can talk by silence
So, blinkered and acquisitive,
Even at the heart of lust and conflict
We can find form, our lives transcended
While and because we live.

But here our jargon fails; no word,
'Miracle' or 'catalysis,'
Will fit what dare not have occurred
But does occur regardless;
Let then the poet like the parent
Take it on trust and, looking out
Through his own window to where others
Look out at him, be proudly humbled
And jettison his doubt.

The air blows in, the pigeons cross—
Communication! Alchemy!
Here is profit where was loss
And what were dross are golden,
Those are friends who now were foreign
And gentler shines the face of doom,
The pot of flowers inspires the window,
The air blows in, the vistas open
And a sweet scent pervades the room.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nicolas Nabokov

# RUSSIAN MUSIC AFTER THE PURGE

The resumption—or, as they say in the Soviet Union, the "activation"—of the campaign against "decadent bourgeois culture" started immediately after the end of the last war. At the time, its main protagonist was one of the secretaries of the Central Committee of the Party, member of the Politburo, the late comrade Zhdanov. The order of events was as follows: first came the statement in the summer of 1946 concerning the need to clean up the repertory of the Soviet theaters. Next on the 20th of September, 1946, Zhdanov made a speech in which he attacked all those writers in the Soviet Union who were in some way connected with pre-revolutionary trends. In it he said, quoting Gorky, that the period between 1907 and 1917 was "the most degrading, decadent, and shameful period in the history of Russian literature," and, "in general, in the history of the Russian intelligentsia." "This," declared comrade Zhdanov, "was the period which was dominated by decaying Western influences and Western movements, such as the symbolists, imagists, impressionists, and decadent writers of all kinds who renounced their ties to the people, promulgated the principle of art for art's sake, and preached intentional lack of ideology in literature, thus covering up their own ideological and moral decay. In short, they were trying to conceal, by pretty forms, a total lack of content."

Zhdanov's whole speech re-stated the 1937 thesis that "formalism" is the vice of European culture, and that under formalism are grouped all those writers and poets who do not either represent the so-called "classical tradition" of Russian literature, or do not collaborate in the socialistic construction of the Soviet Union. Those who do are, *eo ipso,* socialist realists.

On February 10, 1948, came the decree of the Central Com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mittee of the Communist Party concerning an opera by a young Georgian composer, Muradeli, called *The Great Friendship*. This decree in a sense summarized and made reference to the previous attacks on the literary, scientific and other cultural fronts. It made clear, for the first time, the cultural position and attitude of the Central Committee and of the Politburo. It classified under "formalism" all those Soviet composers who were in any way a part of the general European evolution of modern music, and, by inference, drew the same conclusions in regard to other media of art.

A year has now passed since the publication of this decree. As will be remembered the decree singled out as first offenders against the mores of Soviet music, six of the most prominent Soviet composers: Prokofiev, Shostakovitch, Khatchaturian, Shebalin, Popov, and Miaskovsky.

To our knowledge, none of these six has "bodily" disappeared from Soviet musical life. No direct punitive action has been taken. On the contrary, all of them have been given an opportunity to "*redeem themselves*" by writing works which would "prove that they have understood the implications of the historic act of February 10, 1948," (*Pravda,* Oct. 30, 1948), that is, "to free themselves from Western influences, to discard atonal and dissonant leftism which is a sign-post of bourgeois decay and corruption, to adhere to the *classical* tradition of Russian music and incorporate in their art the principles of healthy socialist realism." (I am quoting from a report by the secretary general of the Soviet Composers Union, Tikhon Khrennikov, made in April 1948.)

Indirectly, however, measures have been taken to prevent the futher contamination of Soviet society from these carriers of dangerous foreign bacilli: Miaskovsky and Shostakovitch were relieved of their posts as composition teachers in the Moscow conservatory: Shebalin, the director of the conservatory was expelled, and replaced by A. Sveshnikov (the leader of the National Folk Chorus of the Russian Republic): Khatchaturian lost to Tikhon Khrennikov the position of secretary general of the Union of Soviet Composers (S.S.K.)

He also ceased to be head of its Orgkomitet, or organizing committee. This group, working in close collaboration with the Committee on Arts of the Ministry of Education wields huge power since it decides what works will be printed and recommends works for per-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

formance to opera houses, symphony orchestras and touring virtuosos.

Prokofiev, who did not teach nor hold any official post, was ostracized by the simple means of removing nearly all his works from the opera and concert repertories. The same measure was applied, of course, to the other purged composers, but less drastically. Shostakovitch's First and Fifth symphonies, Miaskovsky's Symphony on White-Russian Themes, Katchaturian's Cello Concerto and divers other pieces by the denounced "formalists" have gone right on being played, at least occasionally, since the purge.

Last year's offense, let us recall, was not the first for Shostakovitch. Back in 1937 he had been subjected to disciplinary measures of a similar nature lasting a year and a half. His chief offense had been the opera *Lady Macbeth of Mzensk* and his work of restitution, the Fifth Symphony. This time the troublesome piece was his Ninth Symphony, and his comeback has been accomplished through two film scores, *The Young Guard* and *Michurin*. The first of these is a heroic and optimistic melodrama about the exploits of the Komsomol during the defense of the Don Basin. The other is a biography in color of the Soviet hero I. V. Michurin, founder of Soviet anti-Mendelian biology. Though neither film has yet reached the Stanley Theater, they have passed the musical judges; and two musical excerpts from *The Young Guard* have been printed in *Sovietskaya Muzyka* of October, 1948.

Both excerpts will disappoint the congenial American Shostakovitch lover—they are timid to a degree which makes them pitifully empty (it seems that poor Shostakovitch is afraid of using *any* kind of dissonance, even the most conventional ones). At the same time they do not exhibit any turn to "the classical Russian tradition" which is one of the goals set by the famous decree nor do they show any increase of melodic inventiveness. These two frightened little fragments sound more, like a *devoir d'écolier* from a Prussian conservatory of approximately 1880 than anything else. But then, maybe this kind of music responds better to the provincial tastes of the middle-layer of the Soviet bureaucracy.

The cases of Katchaturian and Prokofiev are simpler than that of Shostakovitch. The former's "formalist illness" is in a sense recently contracted and is fifty per cent non-musical, anyway. This half is a result of his political position. As a Party member, president of the Orgkomitet and Secretary General of the Composers' Union,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he was naturally held responsible for whatever protection the "formalists" had enjoyed prior to their denunciation. A first offender, and a convinced Bolshevik from the periphery of the Union (Armenia), he represents to the Politburo the achievements of a national-culture policy dear to its initiator Stalin. Of all the purged six, he has been the most played since his purge. As a Party member, he has continued, moreover, to serve on Union subcommittees.

If Katchaturian appears now as on his way out of trouble, Prokofiev seems to be in no such position. Not a product of Soviet culture but of pre-revolutionary Russia, a traveled man long resident in such centers of "bourgeois corruption" as Paris and the U.S.A., an associate of the Russian emigré enterprise, Serge de Diaghilev's Ballet Russe, and a resident of the Soviet Union only since 1933, this composer is being referred to more and more in the Soviet press as an incorrigible case. The recently deceased Boris Asafiev, Acting President of the Composers' Union (Stalin being of course Honorary President), also Khrennikov and Marion Koval, editor of *Sovietskaya Muzyka* and a party-line whip, have all denounced him. Consistently and, one surmises, deliberately nowadays, his name is linked with such "servile and corrupt musical business men" as Stravinsky, such "degenerate, blackguard, anti-Russian lackeys of the Western Bourgeoisie" as Diaghilev. His latest opera, moreover, composed under the purge, has been found unacceptable.

The latter, based on a story by Boris Polyevoi and entitled *The Life of a Real Person,* deals with a Soviet flier and hero who lost both legs in the war. In December of last year the conductor Khaikin, who seems to admire Prokofiev deeply, organized in Leningrad a public reading of the opera. He apparently overstepped in this case his prerogatives, for the Leningrad papers scolded him severely, and Khrennikov called the incident "a fatal one for Prokofiev." Khrennikov specified further that "this opera shows that the traditions of Western modernism have captivated his consciousness." Moreover, "to him an acute dramatic situation is an end in itself; and the overplay of naturalistic details seems more important than the creation of musically truthful and convincing images of a Soviet hero with his life-asserting, ebullient will and his bold outlook into the future." Khrennikov also regrets that Prokofiev did not submit the work to his comrade-composers for criticism before its unfortunate concert

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hearing. *Pravda* thinks it "doubtful" whether one "can expect anything to satisfy the needs of the great Soviet people" from a "composer whose work is penetrated to the core" by "Western formalist decay."

In the Soviet Union, as in all bureaucratic totalitarian states, personal hatred and jealousies are of course much more intense and venomous than in the "decadent" Western countries where the individual is not so much of a pawn in the rigid and often ruthless machinery of the State.

Unquestionably, fierce personal jealousies have been provoked by Prokofiev's tremendous success all during the thirties. In January, 1937, when the Shostakovitch music purge was under way, Prokofiev felt extremely uncertain about his position. It took an intervention of Stalin (who at that time was alleged to have said:—"don't bother him, he *is ours*") to silence those who were ready to pounce on Prokofiev.

It is well known, for example, that the late president of the S.K.K.—Boris Asafiev (better known as Igor Glyebov:—In the past Igor Glyebov wrote two books devoted one to Scriabine and the other to Stravinsky for which he had to "repent" publicly. He is also the composer of a trivial ballet *The Flames of Paris* which had considerable success in the USSR), who used to be a friend of Prokofiev in the twenties—broke with him in the middle thirties and kept a bitter grudge against him. After the purge, in April 1948, Asafiev was elected "active" president of the SKK (Stalin was "honorary" president) a post he held until his death at the end of January 1949. The official or semi-official bracketing of Prokofiev with the composers of the decadent West was at least initiated by Asafiev.

Early last spring Prokofiev was very ill. According to Moscow rumors he had had another stroke similar to the one he had in 1946. By early summer he was sufficiently recovered to complete his opera.

What the recent injunction against the opera has done to his health is a matter of conjecture. It appears, however, that his *artistic health*, his "formalist sickness" has been judged to be a "sickness unto death," and that the good doctors of the Central Committee of the Party have given him up for lost. We can only hope that Comrade Asafiev and Comrade Zhdanov's deaths were lucky breaks for Prokofiev. Maybe as others did before him, he will find in himself

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the necessary "courage" to write the kind of frightened, trivial and provincial stuff which apparently Stalin likes.

In contrast to the incurable maladjustments of Prokofiev, Shostakovitch is definitely on the road to "recovery." Not *only* has he been sent to us on a mission; he has also been praised by the head of the composers' union for his "successful" film music. His position last year was grave. As a major offender he might easily have lost most of his income and his apartment. Koval actually suggested at a Composers' Union meeting as late as last October that those afflicted with "decadent, bourgeois tendencies . . . could very profitably move out of Moscow to the periphery of the vast Soviet land and get their inspiration from a close contact with the life of the people in the provinces, in collective farms and factories." This of course must have sounded ominous to Soviet composers. They, as all other Soviet citizens, know much too well what a trip to the "periphery" may imply. Happily, however, Mr. Shostakovitch encountered nothing so drastic as forced residence on the "periphery" of the Soviet Union.

In analyzing Shostakovitch's music Mr. Koval has given us a fairly clear picture of what kind of music Stalin expects his composers to write. Defrocked from its absurd verbiage and stated in reasonably practical terms, Soviet composers are asked to beware of:

1. Discordant counterpoint (presumably the Hindemith style and atonality).
2. Introducing into the "sacred soil of the pure classic Russian tradition jazz neurosis and Stravinskyan rhythmical paroxysms."
3. Inability to write "singable" melodic lines.
4. Naturalistic approach to subject matter. (The love scene in "Lady Macbeth.")
5. "Limitless adulation of a chorus of sycophants" (in other words, success).

He can, however, be cured by the following regimen:

1. Avoiding "dissonance."
2. Avoiding any harmonic syntax more advanced than that of the late Sergei Rachmaninov.
3. Learning to write "easy" tunes.
4. Avoiding dependence on "abstract" instrumental and symphonic forms.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

5. Writing more songs on Soviet subjects.
6. Strictly abstaining from jazz rhythms, paroxystic syncopation, "fake" (meaning dissonant) polyphony and atonality.
7. Writing operas about Soviet life.
8. Turning his attention in general to the song of the great Soviet people and forgetting about the West.

This regimen has now been scrupulously followed for a year by Shostakovitch and of course by all other Soviet composers.

The results do not seem to be satisfactory judging from statements made by Messieurs Khrennikov and Koval and only recently reiterated by *Pravda* and *Izvestia*.

Last April (1948) an issue of *Krokodil, Pravda's* weekly humorous supplement, carried on its back page the following cartoon: A man and a woman seated on a bench under a tree: in the tree a bird is singing: the woman says, "How do you like the bird's song?" "I can't say anything," says the man, "until I know who wrote the song." Several weeks later, perhaps by pure coincidence, the editorial board of *Krokodil* was purged for "general laxity" and for "not keeping abreast of the great epoch of Socialist construction."

Had the bird announced its song and said, for example, "Comrades, I will sing you an excerpt from Gian-Carlo Menotti's opera, *The Medium,*" the man on the bench could have replied, even before he had heard the bird sing, "This is not for me. This is neuropathological music fit only for the bourgeois audiences of America. The heroine of this opera is not an honest, optimistic and cleancut Soviet citizen; she is a professional crook, a spiritualist, an alcoholic and, besides all that, a murderess."

Had the bird been singing a piece by Stravinsky, the man might as surely have replied, "This is the height of bourgeois decadence, the music of a circus magician and an American businessman."

For music by Schoenberg the comment would have been, "This is anti-aesthetic, anti-harmonic, chaotic and inane. It epitomizes the decay of bourgeois culture."

If the bird had suddenly swung into behop, or rebop, as it is customarily referred to in *Sovietskaya Muzyka,* the man would probably have called a militiaman and said, "Comrade, this kind of stuff is an insult to our great Soviet culture. I publicly denounce this animal as a bourgeois paranoiac and an enemy of the Soviet state.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Arrest that bird!" (It should be remarked parenthetically that *Krokodil's* imaginary man talks in indirect quotations from the Soviet press.)

Since the purge the Central Committee of the party, through its mouthpieces in the Union of Soviet Composers, has devoted a great deal of space to the condemnation of contemporary Western music. In this health campaign, aimed at the protection of Soviet music from Western contamination, practically all the well-known contemporary Western composers have been denounced as "decadent formalists," "pseudo-modernists," or simple "cheats and scoundrels." The leaders of the campaign have tried to be explicit; but, on account of skimpy and outdated information about Western music, they have sometimes obscured "the clear-cut wisdom" of the party line. Thus, in a speech by Asafiev, late president of the Composers' Union, Paul Hindemith is referred to, along with Schoenberg, Berg, Krenek and Webern, as an "antiharmonic atonalist," which, of course, he has never been. In the April issue of *Sovietskaya Muzyka,* Mr. Koval denounces the whole school "of graphic, linear pseudo-counterpoint" initiated by Hindemith, "which is slavishly followed by so many pseudo-modernists in Europe and America." In another issue of the same magazine Walter Piston is singled out for grudging praise. "Among the compositions performed at the Amsterdam Festival" says *Sovietskaya Muzyka,* of July 1948, "one should mention a fairly brilliant symphonic work by Walter Piston." In America, however, we consider Walter Piston one of our most "linear" composers and one closely allied to the school of Hindemith.

The Frenchmen Milhaud and Auric are usually found in a list of "servile teasers of the snobbish bourgeois tastes of a capitalist city." Poulenc's name is sometimes included and sometimes excluded from this list. At times his work is singled out for considerable praise. His "apt and artful settings" of the poems of such "truly democratic poets" as Louis Aragon (long a party member) and Paul Eluard (certainly a fellow traveler) are found to be both "highly successful" and "forward-looking."

In the U.S.A., the main offenders, according to the Soviet press, are Gian-Carlo Menotti and Henry Cowell. Reference to the former has already been made. As for the latter, the July, 1948, issue of *Sovietskaya Muzyka* carried a cartoon of Mr. Cowell, his feet

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

swimming in air, beating the keyboard of a piano with his right fist and at the same time plucking the strings with his left hand. The reference, of course, is to certain experiments with "note-clusters" conducted by Mr. Cowell twenty-five and more years ago, some of which were published at that time, I believe, by the Soviet State Music Press. Below the cartoon is a rhyme which says, "Cowell bangs it (the piano). 'Hop-la! Look out, or I'll kill you.' The listener sits silent, afraid for his life. Look at the brute! He is a hysteric, and about to collapse. . . . All this is good business in America, where music is used to make money."

A general picture of American music is given by another cartoon in the same issue. It represents a jazz band accompanying a bleating goat. The caption in verse reads:

*What is the use of melody and sentiment in the atomic age?*
*Sing, O goat, a Te Deum to Art.*

At another point "musicologists" Copland and Saminsky are grouped with psychiatrists Freud and Borneigg, philosopher Bergson, "gangsters" Raymond Mortimer and Bertrand Russell, as false authorities to whom Soviet musicologists and critics should never refer. The American critics Virgil Thomson and Olin Downes are frequently taken to task.

The main criminals of Western music, however, are not, according to Soviet thought, the American composers. Americans are merely the heirs of European decadence. The decadence starts with Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and with Debussy's *Pelleas et Melisande*. "It is under these two Impressionist trees and their shady branches that there grew up so many 'fleurs du mal' of modernism," says Mr. Koval. From there come the "great leaders" of Western decadence—the Stravinskys and Ravels, the Schoenbergs and Bergs, the Weberns and the Kreneks, the Hindemiths and Kurt Weills. The younger generation—Messiaen and Jolivet in France, Benjamin Britten in England and Menotti here in America—are descendants of an "inglorious," "ignoble," "decaying" civilization. As such, of course, they occupy only minor positions in the bourgeois anti-Parnassus.

To us the important question to be answered is of course, *why* did the Politburo include music in its campaign against Western culture and why did it surround this campaign with so much fervor and drama?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Music is a medium of communication which has no ideographic content. That is, it is not representational of any concrete ideas. Thus, it is rather difficult for a layman to know what actually goes on in a new piece of music, particularly when this piece of music is of a symphonic or chamber orchestra character. And notice that the present attack is directed precisely toward the excessive use of these two forms of musical composition.

A police character of a famous Russian satirist of the Czarist regime, Saltykov, once said, "What I don't understand is undoubtedly dangerous to the security of the state." The Politburo feels that the composers are doing something over which it has no immediate control. Some form of supervision must be established. Let them write music that is pleasing and comprehensible to the new Soviet middle class. That will keep the composers from participating in mysterious, unknown, and therefore subversive activities. A good name for such activities is "formalism."

Despite all the jargon about formalism, classicism, and socialist realism, the real fear of the Soviet government is the state of mind which may grow within a closed body of specialists, with its own favorably-inclined critics, and its possible protectors in government circles. This state of mind is creative individualism—which is still tied in many ways to the Western European tradition. It may lead to political individualism, particularly since some of the composers, with their wide national and international reputations, may feel themselves by definition outside and above the Party line. One should not forget that the Politburo considers the people it governs as a part of an immense pedagogical enterprise, and the individual is only valid insofar as he actively and submissively participates in this enterprise. The Politburo and the Central Committee of the Party are both teachers and wardens.

It is evident that a closed cell within the framework of a totalitarian police state is intolerable. It is also evident that music is only one of the areas of intellectual life where such a cell may attempt to form itself. The theater, the literary world, the cinema, painting, and pure science, are other domains which are or may become dangerous in the eyes of the Politburo. It is, therefore, only natural that the Soviet government has extended its cultural purge to all these areas.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# BOOKS

## THE STATISTICAL SOLDIER

THE AMERICAN SOLDIER: ADJUSTMENT DURING ARMY LIFE. By Samuel A. Stouffer, Edward A. Suchman, Leland C. DeVinney, Shirley A. Star, Robin M. Williams, jr. Princeton University Press. $7.50.

THE AMERICAN SOLDIER: COMBAT AND ITS AFTERMATH. By Samuel A. Stouffer, Arthur A. Lumsdaine, Marion Harper Lumsdaine, Robin M. Williams, jr., M. Brewster Smith, Irving L. Janis, Shirley A. Star, Leonard S. Cottrell, jr. Princeton University Press. $7.50.

Too many obvious frauds were at last committed in the name of sociology. At the same time, the allied breeds of social psychology and social anthropology began to promise new and exciting forms of cross-fertilization. So the old and toothless beast was put out to pasture. In its place has come its more carnivorous son, known in his more modest mood under some such name as "social relations," or, more often, in a tone of majestic simplicity, as "social science."

The historical eye perhaps finds little new in this transformation. Sociology has whored after the natural sciences from the start; certain persons have always been able to convince themselves that these passions were requited; and the result has been to beguile the sociologists into egotistic and self-evidently absurd theorizations. Such efforts bring the whole study into mild disrepute and lead the younger practitioners to try and flee the family disgrace by hanging out some new and deceptive shingle. The champions of "social science" today have hardly advanced beyond Lester Ward or Comte in the grandiosity of their promises.

But they have far surpassed such a lonely and self-respecting figure as Ward in the persistence and success of their showmanship. Bursting onto university campuses after the war, overflowing with portentous if vague hints of mighty wartime achievements (not, alas, to be disclosed because of security), fanatical in their zeal and shameless in their claims, they persuaded or panicked many university administrations into giving their studies top priorities. Needless to say, they scored an even more brilliant success with the foundations. Certain foundation directors even decided that virtually all their funds for research in the social

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sciences should be expended on projects of the "social science" variety; the individual scholar, so far as they were concerned, was through.

The mark of the beast is today eloquent through our academic life: the remorseless jargon (certain social scientists in one great university recently produced a solemn memorandum entitled "Toward a Common Language in the Social Sciences"—English not apparently being adequate); the notion that a knowledge of the Trobriand Islander or the Sioux is the first requisite for the study of modern America or Russia; the idea of research by committee, six men always being accounted better than one and the responsibility being distributed like the credit lists in a Hollywood film; the fetish of "interdisciplinary" projects; the proliferation of apparatus, each new gadget more elaborate and expensive than the rest: the whole happily subsidized by the foundations, carrying to triumphant completion their ancient hope of achieving the bureaucratization of American intellectual life.

Well, the "social science" machinery has been grinding away for some years now. Occasionally skeptics approach the devout and say with proper humility: You have basked in the smile of deans and in the favor of foundations. You are discovering the secrets of the ages. We wish to share in the new enlightenment you are bringing us. But what, oh wise one, should we read? Can you name a single book that would give some idea of the great revelations which lie in wait? The oracle at that point used to become muffled. Then one began to hear of *The American Soldier.* This work, one was told, was the real stuff; this would settle the doubts.

*The American Soldier* is now fifty percent with us, the first two of four large volumes having been published by the Princeton University Press. These volumes represent the analysis by what the jacket describes as "a brilliant group of sociologists and social psychologists" of materials collected by the Research Branch, Information and Education Division, United States Army. These materials, primarily surveys of attitude and opinion, were gathered to assist the Army in the best utilization of its manpower during the war. The first volume deals with problems of adjustment during army life; the second with the problems of combat and its aftermath. Volumes three and four will deal primarily with technical and methodological questions.

It should be said, first of all, that these volumes give an entirely convincing picture of the great usefulness to the Army of the Research Branch. One can only admire the resourcefulness with which the tests were devised and the courage with which the heads of the Branch opposed Army policies they considered unwise. Nor can one do any-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing but praise the prevailing modesty and clarity with which the results of the research are written up. There can be no question either that the problems and methods embraced under the "social science" rubric include much of very great importance to the study of human behavior, and that these studies should be prosecuted.

But to say this is not to satisfy the social relations hucksters. Indeed, the more basic questions are raised, not by the relatively innocuous practice of "social science," but by its mystique—its pretensions to new knowledge and to new certitude, its pretensions ultimately to a body of knowledge with the same properties of verifiability and predictability as modern physical theory. Turning to *The American Soldier,* one can legitimately ask: (1) does this kind of research yield anything new? and (2) does what it does yield constitute a higher and more certain form of knowledge?

The answer to the first question is easy. Most of *The American Soldier* is a ponderous demonstration in Newspeak of such facts as these: new recruits do not like noncoms; front-line troops resent rear echelon troops; combat men manifest a high level of anxiety as compared to other soldiers; married privates are more likely than single privates to worry about their families back home. Indeed, one can find little in the 1200 pages of text and the innumerable surveys which is not described more vividly and compactly, and with far greater psychological insight, in a small book entitled *Up Front* by Bill Mauldin. What Mauldin may have missed will turn up in the pages of Ernie Pyle.

The authors of *The American Soldier* show a sporadic and apprehensive recognition of their lack of originality. One contributor writes defensively that perhaps Conrad could communicate the "feel" of a hurricane better, but that meteorology has its uses too. A more aggressive contributor, describing writers in his barbarous patois as "insightful observers," comments that their "recorded observations and insights are, however, fragmentary, relatively unsystematic, and nonquantitative. What can therefore be added is further systematization, based upon a quantitative treatment of many soldiers' responses."

"Social science," thus, does not discover; it systematizes through quantification and thereby places knowledge on a truly "scientific" basis. Such an undertaking involves a technique; and the technique you must believe in to accept *The American Soldier,* is polling. Recent criticism by such persons as Lindsay Rogers and Harry S. Truman has shaken our faith in the infallibility of the pollsters. Indeed, given a conflict between a poll and an "insightful observer," even the authors of *The American Soldier* generally (see, e. g., volume II, page 29) reinterpret

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the poll in order to bring it into line with common sense. The individual human experience is supposed to vanish away in the whirl of punch cards and IBM machines. Yet an indissoluble residue of subjectivity remains. "There is no escape," even *The American Soldier* concedes, "from the need for using 'good judgment' in interpretations." So, beneath the disguise of Superman, we gradually discern the "insightful observer" whom we had previously consigned to an unimportant place on the library shelf.

What does "good judgment" (or even "'good judgment'") mean to the social psychologist? One cannot escape the impression that their whole system of interpretation is inherently deficient in two crucial aspects: in a sense of individual psychology and in a sense of history. A comparison of the chapter in *The American Soldier* on "Morale Attitudes of Combat Flying Personnel in the Air Corps" with the studies of such Air Force psychiatrists as Grinker, Hastings and Bond shows how incomparably richer and more illuminating the depth method of the psychiatrist is than the polls of the social psychologist. As for history, the authors of *The American Soldier* have almost achieved the tour-de-force of writing about the American in World War II with practically no reference to the historical context from which he came. Nor do the few random sallies in this direction inspire confidence. When someone writes that "the intellectual history of the period between the two world wars was one of a developing climate of opinion distrustful of committing oneself to causes," it can only be concluded that he has never heard of communism, fascism or the New Deal. One comes to feel, indeed, that the American soldier existed, neither in life nor in history, but in some dreary statistical vacuum. One ends by wondering whether the whole theory of social quantification does not involve so systematic an abstraction from the total experience of man as to squeeze out the more meaningful factors in individual behavior in the sleight-of-hand which pretends to eliminate—but cannot—the insight of the observer.

*The American Soldier* is an entirely harmless book. The Army certainly wasted no money in maintaining the Research Branch, even if the Social Science Research Council might have done better to subsidize the same number of individual scholars. "Social science" as a whole is perhaps doing no present harm, except as it engrosses money and energy which might be put more wisely to other uses. But it might eventually do great harm in obscuring from ourselves the ancient truths concerning the vanity of human wishes, and the distortions worked by that vanity upon the human performance.

If *The American Soldier* represents the highest achievement of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

new "science" of human behavior, then we have a considerable distance to go before resigning ourselves to a regime of total manipulation. Its practitioners are in the stage of alchemy, not of chemistry. Probably that is why they proclaim so loudly that they are on the verge of discovering the philosopher's stone.

**Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.**

## THE INFLUENCE OF MR. LEAVIS

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCRUTINY. Edited by Eric Bentley. George W. Stewart, Inc. $5.75.

Though F. R. Leavis is a first-rate critic, and he dominates this collection, it is rather a dull book. So much of it is given over to an arid defense of the autonomy of literary criticism: it is not literary history, says Mr. Leavis in reply to F. W. Bateson; not philosophy, in reply to René Wellek and George Santayana; not a new science, in reply to I. A. Richards. "If I profess myself so freely to be no philosopher," Mr. Leavis says, "it is because I feel that I can afford my modesty; it is because I have pretensions—pretensions to being a literary critic." Such a statement evades the very question it seems to answer. Of course the critic is no philosopher. But at the practical level at which criticism is carried on, literature only reluctantly admits of such distinctions; it is impure and keeps stubbornly propounding us extra-aesthetic problems. The trick is to deal with them and yet remain a literary critic. How priggish Mr. Leavis' declaration sounds when it is set off against what Eliot has said, who is also concerned to defend the autonomy of literary criticism: "You can never draw the line between aesthetic criticism and moral and social criticism; you cannot draw a line between criticism and metaphysics; you start with literary criticism, and however rigorous an aesthete you may be, you are over the frontier into something else sooner or later. The best you can do is to accept these conditions and know what you are doing when you do it. And, on the other hand, you must know how and when to retrace your steps. You must be very nimble."

There is something of this priggishness about *Scrutiny* generally, and it prompts the editor of this book priggishly to praise it for refusing to follow the "fashion of the decade—Cynicism in the Twenties, Marxism in the Thirties, Existentialism and Crisis Theology in the Forties." *Scrutiny's* detachment has its value, but it springs as much from narrow

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

insularity as from correct critical principles. The literary nominalism that Mr. Leavis so doggedly insists upon, with its pragmatical distrust of anything that goes beyond the hard particulars of the text and its horror of "abstractions," is peculiarly English and insular and excuses him from any acquaintance with the advanced thinking of the time. He can point a confident finger to the good or bad in literature, scrupulously discriminating between the two with a specificness few can equal, but he cannot—will not—then consider that literary good in life, in its relation to experience. He has a fine essay on E. M. Forster, for example, that brilliantly gets at that author's chief weakness—a failure always to realize a certain "poetic" intention present in his novels—but when Mr. Leavis is led to speak of *A Passage to India* as a "classic of the liberal spirit," he does so uncomfortably and summarily, with an evident feeling of being out of bounds.

His nominalist critical method, too, deprives his writings of form; for want of a strong controlling generalization they tend to resolve themselves into a series of points. They are not, for the most part, shaped from within, but mechanically borrow such order as they have from the texts they consider.

In its attitude toward avant-garde literature particularly, *Scrutiny*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is priggish and insular (and inconsistent). What was then *Work in Progress* Mr. Leavis calls a piece of "sophistication, cosmopolitan if not very subtle," and against it raises the angry philistine cry of cultural decadence (though *The Waste Land* meets with his approval). Involved in this lack of sympathy is the historically inappropriate standard of the Johnsonian Common Reader, in terms of which the "anti-highbrow publics" and the " 'modernist' publics" of today are a pair of aberrant extremes, there being "no public of Common Readers with whom the critic can rejoice to concur. He cannot leave his standards to look after themselves." The implication here—that simple benightedness, "cultural decline," is responsible for this state of affairs—is misleading and unhistorical. Mr. Leavis is obliged to criticize criticism for the same reason that Eliot writes poetry about writing poetry: in an age that calls all things into question, literature, to continue to exist at all, has been compelled to turn in upon itself in an attempt to elucidate an indestructible essence.* The modern poet and critic require from their audience, not the concurrence, possible only in a stable culture, of Common Readers, but a faith on the reader's part in the validity of their enterprise. The avant-garde public, for all its vagaries and mistakes, gave the first hearing to, and consistently supported, among other things, the only serious poetry written in this century. This too ought to be recalled if one is going to recall that it once thought *Point Counter Point* a great novel.

But, having noted these things, one can go on to say that Mr. Leavis is a critic of genuine personal taste and independent conviction, though the evidence for this is less in these pages than in such a work as *The Great Tradition.* Judgment is paramount in all his writings; there is a refreshing absence of coyness in his constant committing of himself to an opinion about how good something is. Some of these opinions are egregiously wrongheaded—as for instance the denunciatory asides Mr. Leavis directs at Flaubert in *The Great Tradition*; but then, how pleasant to read a critic willing so plainly to mark out the limits of his sensibility. There are critics who can speculate boldly about literature, their pages strewn with references to a hundred books, and never once imply a judgment that challenges the "best" opinion. How *reasonable* they are, how urbane their taste; everything is "significant"—and everything is as good as everything else. Mr. Leavis is not one of these.

It is easy to lose patience with a kind of criticism that says A is better than B but not so good as C; that, to praise Jane Austen, must

* See "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," by Clement Greenberg, *The Partisan Reader.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

depreciate Fielding. And yet, when one has really been caught up in a book, when one has just laid it down, full of the excitement of its excellence, that is the sort of thing one wants first to say. In old age, I suppose, when excitement is only annoying, there is a transcendent wisdom possible in which all excellence is reconciled. But such wisdom, prematurely arrived at, wears a suspiciously flaccid and genteel look.

In an extremely good review, in this book, of Eliot's *Selected Essays,* Edgell Rickword remarks that "It must be every ambitious critic's aim to resolve the dichotomy between life and art; and every superficial critic does it constantly with negligent ease." Clearly, Mr. Leavis is not an "ambitious" critic; but when one appreciates the justice of Mr. Rickword's second observation, one isn't awfully disturbed by the lack of "ambition" in this forthright and energetic writer. If Mr. Leavis cannot discourse profoundly on the Forsterian ethos, still, he is able to point out—what no one else has done—where this ethos is imperfectly realized in Forster's novels.

What you find in Mr. Leavis' writing, and what is so often missing elsewhere, is a genuine experiencing of the literary work. So much big critical talk, by people who may have a more sophisticated intelligence than he, conceals a poverty of response to literature, or the most timid conventional response; and they, I suppose, are quickest to call him "academic." Mr. Leavis is always sending you off to read, or back to reread—off or back, that is, to the *experience* of a book, which is his only concern. For him a piece of literature is in the last analysis more interesting than anything you can say about it. That is the essential modesty of the man, a modesty not incompatible with strong opinions.

**Martin Greenberg**

## IN THE TRADITION OF INTEGRITY

SKETCH FOR A SELF-PORTRAIT. By Bernard Berenson. Pantheon. $3.00.

Numerous reviews have acclaimed Berenson's *Sketch for a Self-Portrait* as a golden hive of brilliant observations and profound insights. Yet it is precisely in that matter of local brilliance that the book seems to me to fail. The intelligence is always there, but it is seldom operating with an incisiveness or perception that excites or enlarges one's own mind, and although the book is very short it sometimes becomes tedious. This, I suspect, is due to the form in which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it is cast. It reads like a spoken book, but it has the air of a long soliloquy rather than of conversation stimulated by the presence of congenial friends. Nevertheless the book carries a considerable interest, but it is an interest that must be obliquely rather than directly approached. Berenson is one of the last distinguished survivors of a world that is remote from us in more than time. We are separated from it less by transitions in fashion than by our lost security and our lost values. Men and arts have ceased increasingly to be at their ease, and it has been necessary for criticism to become more determinedly militant, simultaneously more difficult and more elementary. One can observe the progressive stages in this transition by comparing the impressionistic pages of, say, Pater's *The Renaissance* with the heavily technical, and sometimes awkward pages of, say, Wilenski. (Significantly, Pater's name occurs frequently in Berenson's little book, as well as a telling reference to the "imaged tapestry narratives" of George Moore.) Those who deplore as unlovely modern criticism's departure from the summer terraces forget that sandbags and dugouts are the last defense of a Capitol in siege, and there is more truth than melodrama in saying that the enemy, having captured the suburbs, now carries on the battle from street to street.

It is against this background that the contemporary critic, reduced to khaki and heroism, must read Berenson's *Sketch* with regret for a quality, a tone irrevocably lost, a subtlety of personal texture, blending by nice gradations of shade into a background whose mellowness of light is quite induplicable in our own day. Even the portrait photographs of Berenson that are included present a face embodying a positive achievement of leisured culture the production of which our own society might well recognize as a lost art. The small scarred corps of first-rate critics today are recognizable chiefly by their look of battle-fatigue. It is sometimes urged by the influentially fatuous who resent the seriousness, the Pharisaism (a term magnificently ennobled by the only use to which it can be put any more) of the best modern criticism and art, that grace and urbanity, the note of the personal, have departed. What comes through beautifully in Berenson's little book (comes through, as it were, by accident) is that this ancient elegant gentleman walking among his flowers or his paintings and books, and wearing in those tags, "expert" and "connoisseur," the labels most calculated to soothe and mollify our own belles lettrists and avowed enemies of disciplined criticism, is in a direct line with the hard pressed but the bravely battling critics of our time—certainly not with their enemies: those bland-featured dons and academics who envy the lost

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ease of earlier critical generations rather than the positives that made that ease possible. I have heard such a person praise Berenson's *Sketch* and revile the "New Critics" (as he called them) in a single conversation, as if one judgment were deducible from the other. But the intelligence and integrity of mind that is reflected (imperfectly reflected, it must be confessed) in Berenson's essay confirm the fact that being a sheep rather than a goat is not merely a matter of fleece. This, it seems to me, is the chief value of the book: it establishes a line of communication between a happier time when the terms scholar, connoisseur, critic, and gentlemen were still seen frequently consorting together, and a grimy time when (whatever a scholar or a connoisseur may be) a first-rate critic is one of the last defenders of citadels that appear already to have surrendered, and one more likely to be insulted than rewarded by bookish journalists and collaborationists performing in our weekly literary reviews.

**Marius Bewley**

## REDISCOVERY OF AMERICA

AMERICA AND COSMIC MAN. By Wyndham Lewis. Doubleday & Company. $2.75.

The usual attitude of intellectuals toward America is that it is a dark (not deep: one never says America is deep in anything)—a dark pit of capitalism, bureaucracy and other monsters of mechanism; a slough of vulgar bourgeois values, small town narrowness, big city isolation, and grotesqueries of commercial culture; the feeding-ground of stupid, piggish politicians; and more. In a sense, of course, all of this is true. But America in the minds of American highbrows is very often little more than a nightmarish cartoon. There are a number of reasons for this. First: it is unfortunately true that the present nature of our society occasions a great deal of personal suffering in the lives of intellectuals (and one naturally feels a debt to one's own suffering, a debt easily paid with the ready cash of loathing and hatred). Second: it is time we freely admitted that there is something merely about being an intellectual that makes one very unreceptive to the true, raw substance of democratic living. Third: at best, we view America with European eyes (we are all Europeans anyway, of course). European ideas are our means of understanding America because they are very often the best and very often the only ideas available. But they can also hinder our perception of what is essentially a radically new way of life, a fresh departure in the his-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

torical experience of man, because Europe's culture was the product of an entirely different set of conditions and must undergo a process of severe adaptation before it can shed American light.

We should practice the same relation between European culture and American experience as the Europeans, in creating their culture, did between their new conditions of life and the ancient cultures of Rome and Greece. To help us in this purpose, we have a new book—from the hands of an able representative of the culture of Europe—which attempts to define the unique quality of American experience. Wyndham Lewis believes that it is "the destiny of America to produce the first of a new species of man," to replace the now moribund "Western Man." This new creature he has "seen and talked with in America." He calls him "Cosmic Man," meaning internationalist or universalist, a person unrooted in class, race, nation, or any narrowly defined community. The product of the American "melting-pot," Cosmic Man—not fully "melted" into universality as yet—will be the kind of human being fit to leave our present desert and enter the Promised Land of a world socialist state.

No one to my knowledge has ever made as much out of the "melting-pot" notion of America as Mr. Lewis does. Or, for that matter, out of the "pot" itself—the American urban environment. As he says: "My remarks have had for their object the provision of a philosophic background for my running panegyric of that 'rootless Elysium' of the American city: irresponsible, dirty, corrupt, a little crazy. . . . " The core of this "philosophic background" is contained in the chapter called "The Case Against Roots," a brilliant and original defense of what we have gotten into the bad habit of calling "alienation." He calls this rootlessness, more correctly, freedom: "Freedom and irresponsibility are commutative terms." (This is certainly half-right; whether it is altogether correct, is a more difficult question.) Moreover: "The United States is full of people who have escaped from their families, figuratively." This and more is all the result of the melting-pot, the fact that America is an inverse empire that takes the world into itself rather than going out and conquering it. America "can only be something more universal than the Roman Empire, because its metropolitan area is coterminous with its imperial area." We are either a "disorderly collection of people . . . a sort of wastepaper basket"; or we are "a human laboratory for the manufacture of Cosmic Man." Mr. Lewis is certain that we are the latter.

This is a very rich book. There is not only the superlative expression of a new and fundamental perspective, but also much exciting and realistic analysis of contemporary American life: for example, Mr. Lewis' appreciation of the "American Appetite for the Incongruous"; his rare

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

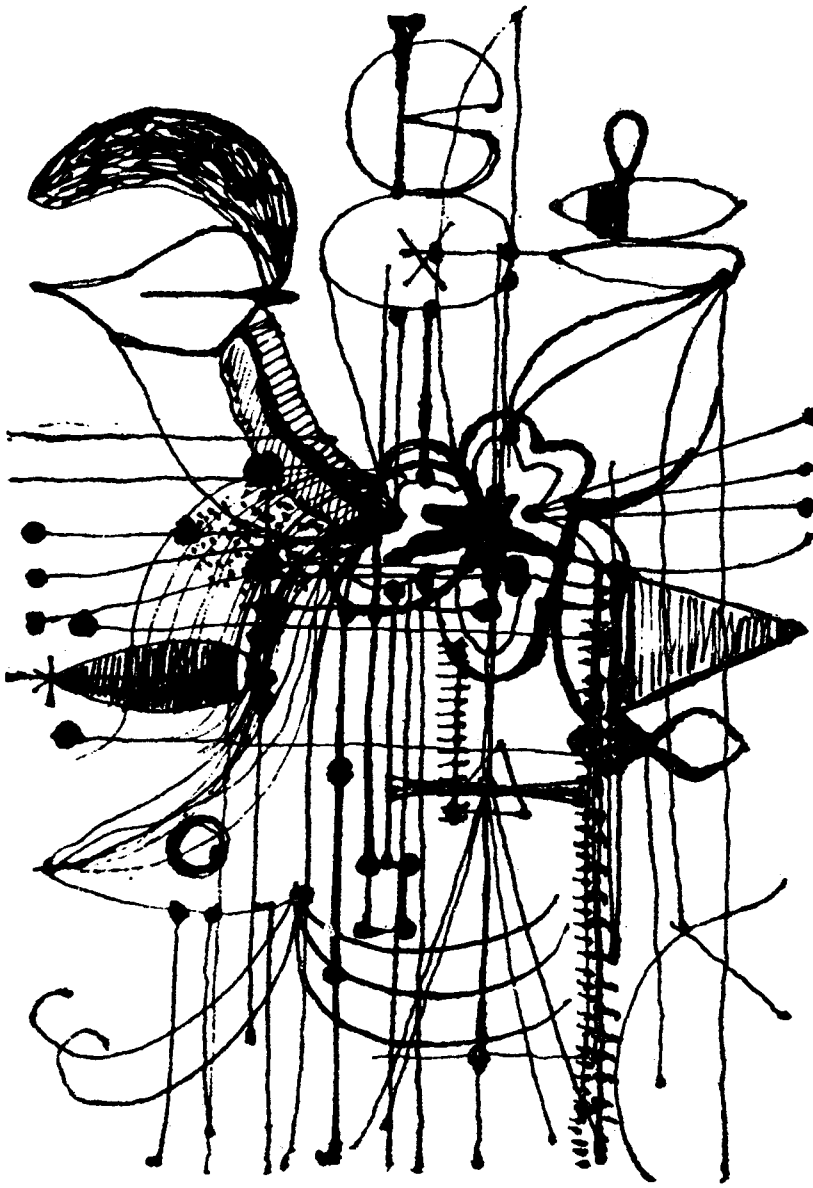
understanding of the elements of criminality in American life; or his short sketch of Roosevelt's personality, which is the most penetrating that has yet appeared on that most complex and fascinating subject. And his rambling appraisal of American history and historical personalities is *refreshingly* un-legendary, while not sinning on the other side of militant "debunkmanship."

No doubt, there are a good number of genuine horrors in the American experience. But—and I hope this does not sound too wayward—that is not really the point. The real point is one of emphasis, and those who emphasize the frightful aspects of our life are forgetting two primary matters: 1) that European civilization as the dominant one on our planet is finished—and therefore one can no longer choose to ignore raw and vital existences like America in favor of more highly formed ones; 2) American life has not settled in its final cast, it is confused and contradictory, and so the horrors, no matter how truly they are actually "out there," are not fully real because their status is not final. In a sense, nothing in America is altogether real but its future. The stunted, nascent, bawdy, disorganized elements of the future, however, exist in the present, and we must discover and reverence them (if we are still capable of reverence). That is our function and our fulfillment as American intellectuals—the perception and expression of our uniquely democratic future as we find it in the raw present. And if we find nothing, we are either blind or doomed. There is a very good chance that we are only blind.

**David T. Bazelon**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



RICHARD POUSETTE-DART. Pen and ink drawing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED